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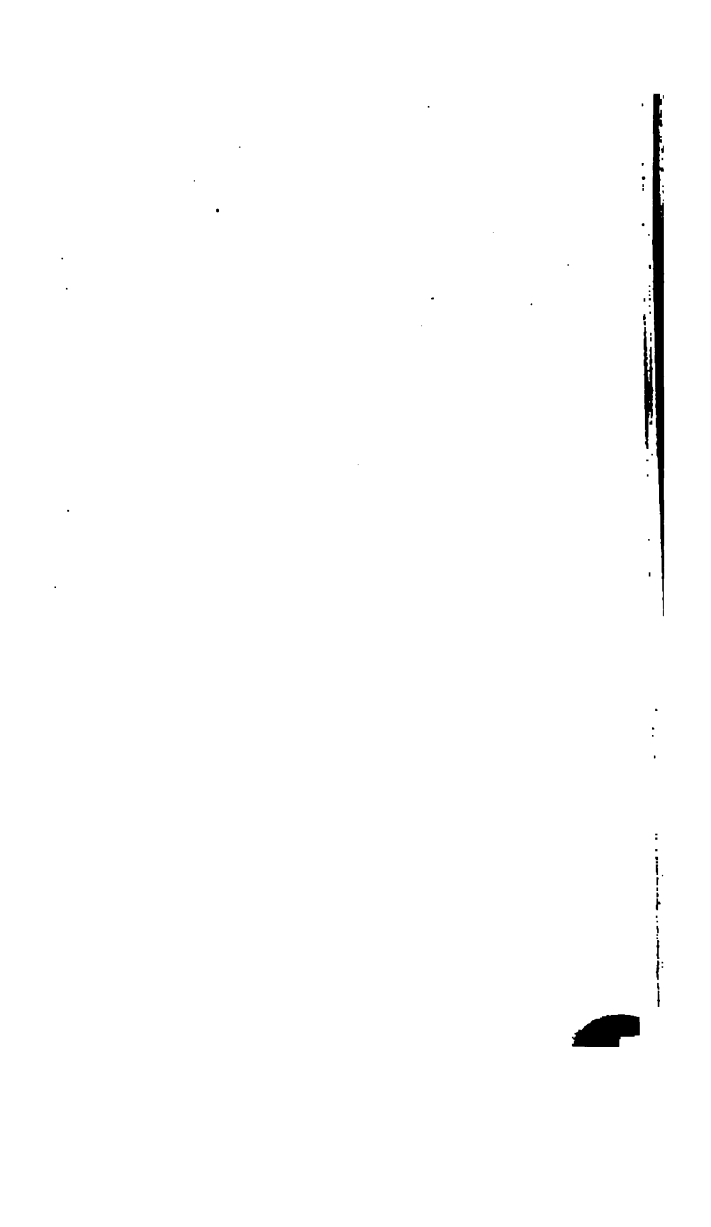
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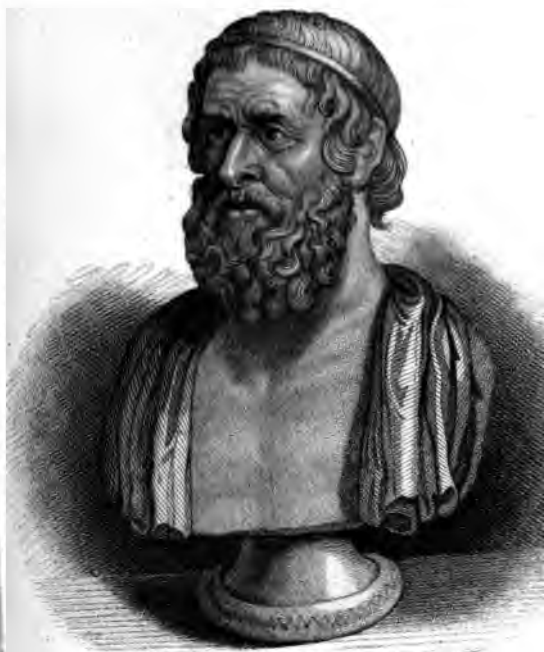
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SOPHOCLES.

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SOPHOCLES.

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“This translation is remarkably close and concise, and the language is easy and natural, and suited to the sentiments. In a word, the English poet seems to have preserved that elegance and simplicity for which the Grecian is so deservedly admired.”

—MONTHLY REVIEW.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

OF

SOPHOCLES.

THIS excellent tragic writer was born at Colone, a village in Attica, about 497 years before Christ. Although his father Sophilus is said to have exercised the humble occupation of a blacksmith, he did not neglect the education of his son, who, while he gave early indications of extraordinary genius, and a remarkable aptitude for the higher branches of literature, at the same time cultivated the accomplishments of music and dancing, in both of which arts he failed not to distinguish himself, particularly after the battle of Salamis, when he led a chorus of youths round a trophy erected in honour of that victory.

As the profession of arms was, at that period, more honourable, and probably more advantageous, than any other, Sophocles entered the army at the usual age, and had the honour to serve under the great Pericles. His valour and conduct were here so conspicuous, that in a short time he was appointed to a high military dignity, and in several battles is reported to have shared in the supreme command

of the Athenian armies with his former leader. His services in the field were rewarded by his fellow-citizens, who raised him to the high office of archon, the duties of which he executed with credit and honour.

The first appearance of Sophocles as a dramatic writer left no room for doubting the splendour of his talents. The Athenians had captured the island of Scyros, and, in order to celebrate that memorable event, a yearly contest for tragedy was instituted. Sophocles, on this occasion, although he was but twenty-nine years of age, obtained the prize over many experienced competitors, in the number of whom was *Æschylus*, his former friend and preceptor.

He was less fortunate in domestic life than in his public career. His children, disappointed in their eager wishes for his death, and solicitous for the immediate possession of his fortune, summoned him before the judges, at a very advanced age, representing him as in a state of dotage, and utterly incapable of conducting his affairs. The old man appeared in court to repel this charge ; and producing the tragedy of *Œdipus Coloneus*, which he had just finished, asked his judges if the author of such a work could be justly taxed with insanity. The judges, indignant at the imputation which had been preferred against him, confirmed him in the possession of his rights : his ungrateful children were covered with shame and confusion ; and all the people who were present conducted him home in triumph. *His death*, at the age of ninety-one, 406 years be-

fore the Christian era, is said to have been occasioned by excessive joy at obtaining a prize at the Olympic games.

Sophocles is supposed to have written one hundred and twenty tragedies, only seven of which are now remaining: these were received by his contemporaries with that applause which they so well deserved. It is remarked, that he never acted himself in any of his plays, as *Æschylus* and *Euripides* were accustomed to do, his voice being too weak and low for the stage; though he was always present at the representation, and received the applauses of the audience, who, we are told, seldom failed to signify their approbation, both at his entering and quitting the theatre. He was crowned twenty times; and though he probably sometimes shared the fate of his brother poets by unjust censure, could never be prevailed on, as his rivals were, to quit his native country, to which he took every opportunity of showing his sincerest attachment.

The drama is indebted to this great man for the introduction of a third speaker to the dialogue, into which his genius infused greater ease and elegance; to this improvement he likewise added the decoration of painted scenery, and paid a stricter attention to probability and natural incident. The Athenians erected a sumptuous monument to his memory, on which was engraved a swarm of bees, in allusion to the name generally given him on account of his verses, which are, indeed, wonderfully soft and harmonious.

So just an estimate of the merits of Sophocles is

formed by the learned and elegant writer whose translation is here adopted, that we cannot better conclude this brief sketch than in presenting it to our readers.

“Sophocles,” says Dr. Francklin, “may with great truth be called the prince of ancient dramatic poets : his fables (at least, of all those tragedies now extant) are interesting and well chosen ; his plots regular and well conducted ; his sentiments elegant, noble, and sublime ; his incidents natural ; his diction simple ; his manners and characters striking, equal, and unexceptionable ; his choruses well adapted to the subject ; his moral reflections pertinent and useful ; and his numbers, in every part, to the last degree sweet and harmonious. The warmth of his imagination is so tempered by the perfection of his judgment, that his spirit, however animated, never wanders into licentiousness ; while, at the same time, the fire of his genius seldom suffers the most uninteresting parts of his tragedy to sink into coldness and insipidity. His peculiar excellence seems to lie in the descriptive ; and, exclusive of his dramatic powers, he is certainly a greater poet than either of his illustrious rivals. Were I to draw a similitude of him from painting, I should say that his *ordonnance* was so just, his figures so well grouped and contrasted, his colours so glowing and natural ; all his pieces, in short, executed in so bold and masterly a style, as to wrest the palm from every other hand, and point him out as the Raphael of the ancient drama.”

SOPHOCLES.



A J A X

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

MINERVA.

ULYSSES.

AJAX.

TECHESSA, wife of Ajax.

TEUCER, brother to Ajax.

AGAMEMNON.

MENELAUS.

MESSENGER.

CHORUS, composed of ancient men of Salamis.

A J A X.

ARGUMENT.

AFTER the death of Achilles, the Greeks published their intention of bestowing the arms of their deceased hero on that chief who had rendered the greatest services to the common cause. Ajax and Ulysses each prosecuted their claims for this honour, which were decided in favour of the latter by the casting vote of Menelaus. Ajax, frantic with disappointment, and instigated by Minerva, slaughtered a whole flock of sheep, supposing them to be the sons of Atreus; and, after his recovery from delirium, stabbed himself through grief. His half-brother, Teucer, to whom he was tenderly attached, was about to bestow on him the usual rites of sepulture, when he was interrupted by Agamemnon and Menelaus, who sternly insisted that the body of Ajax should remain unburied, in revenge for their intended murder. Teucer, however, persevered in his pious design, and defied the power of the two princes; when Ulysses, by his influence, persuaded Agamemnon to remit the penalty, and to suffer Teucer to bury the body of Ajax without farther molestation.

ACT I.

Scene,—a field near the camp of Ajax.

MINERVA, ULYSSES.

MIN. Son of Laertes, thy unwearied spirit
Is ever watchful to surprise the foe.
I have observed thee wandering mid the tents
In search of Ajax, where his station lies,
At the utmost verge, measuring o'er his steps 5
But late impress'd: like Sparta's hounds of scent,

6 The dogs of Sparta were remarkable for their swiftness
and quick scent:

SOPH.—B

Sagacious dost thou trace him, nor in vain ;
 For know, the man thou seek'st is not far from thee :
 Yonder he lies, with reeking brow and hands
 Deep-stain'd with gore : cease then thy search, and
 tell me 10

Wherefore thou comest, that so I may inform
 Thy doubting mind, and best assist thy purpose.

ULYS. Minerva, dearest of the immortal powers !
 (For, though I see thee not, that well-known voice
 Doth like the Tyrrhene trump awake my soul.) 15
 Right hast thou said, I come to search my foe,
 Shield-bearing Ajax ; him alone I seek :
 A deed of horror hath he done this night,
 If it be he ; for yet we are to know
 The certain proof, and therefore came I here 20
 A willing messenger : the cattle all,
 Our flocks and herds, are, with their shepherds,
 slain !

To Ajax every tongue imputes the crime :
 One of our spies, who saw him on the plain,
 His sword still reeking with fresh blood, confirm'd
 it : 25

Instant I fled to search him, and sometimes
 I trace his footsteps, which again I lose,
 I know not how. In happy hour thou comest
 To aid me, goddess ; thy protecting hand
 Hath ruled me ever, and to thee I trust 30
 My future fate.

MIN. I know it well, Ulysses,
 And therefore came to guard and to assist thee,
 Propitious to thy purpose.

ULYS. Do I right,
 My much-lov'd mistress ?

MIN. Doubtless ; his foul deed
 Doth well deserve it.

ULYS. What could prompt his hand, 35
 To such a desperate act ?

MIN. Achilles' arms ;
 His rage for loss of them.

ULYS. But wherefore thus
 Destroy the flock ?

MIN. 'Twas in your blood he thought
 His hands were stain'd.

ULYS. Against the Grecians, then,
 Was all his wrath ?

MIN. And fatal had it proved 40
 To them, if I had not prevented it.

ULYS. What daring insolence could move his soul
 To such a deed ?

MIN. Alone by night he wander'd
 In secret to attack you.

ULYS. Did he come
 Close to our tents ?

MIN. Even to the double portal, 45
 Where rest your chiefs.

ULYS. What power could then withhold
 His maddening hand ?

MIN. I purposely deceived
 His sight, and saved him from the guilty joy,
 Turning his rage against the mingled flocks,
 Your gather'd spoil : on these with violence 50
 He rush'd, and slaughter'd many : now he thought
 That he had slain the Atridæ, now believed
 Some other chiefs had perished by his hand.
 I saw his madness, and still urged him on,
 That he might fall into the snare I laid. 55
 Tired with his slaughter, now he binds in chains
 The living victim, drives the captive herd
 Home to his tent, nor doubts but they are men :
 There beats with many a stripe the helpless foe.
 But I will show thee this most glaring phrensy, 60
 That to the Grecians what thy eyes beheld
 Thou mayst report : be confident, nor fear
 His utmost malice ; I shall turn his sight
 Askant from thee. Ajax ! what, ho ! come forth !
 Thou, who dost bind in chains thy captive foes ; 65
 Ajax, I say, come forth before the portal !

ULYS. What wouldst thou do, Minerva ? Do not
call him.

MIN. What should Ulysses fear?

ULYS.

O! by the gods.

I do entreat thee, let him stay within.

MIN. But wherefore? Thou hast seen him here
before. 70

ULYS. He ever was, and is, my deadliest foe.

MIN. O! but to laugh an enemy to scorn
Is mirth most grateful.

ULYS.

I had rather still

He came not here.

MIN.

And art thou then afraid

To see a madman?

ULYS.

I should little dread

75

The sight of Ajax in his better mind.

MIN. He will not see thee, be thou e'er so near.

ULYS. Impossible! his eyes are still the same.

MIN. But I shall throw a veil of darkness o'er
them.

ULYS. By powers immortal all things may be
done. 80

MIN. Wait then in silence till he comes.

ULYS.

I will;

And yet, 'twere better to retire.

MIN.

What, ho!

Ajax, again I call thee; wherefore pay'st thou
So little reverence to thy guardian power?

AJAX, MINERVA, ULYSSES.

AJAX. Hail to the daughter of great Jove! to thee,
Minerva, hail! thou comest in happy hour; 86
For I will crown thee with the golden spoils,
Which I have gain'd by thy assisting hand.

MIN. Well hast thou spoke; but say, has Ajax
dipp'd
His spear in Grecian blood?

62 Sophocles has closely copied his great master, Homer, in the character of Ulysses, who is drawn by them both as a man of extraordinary prudence and circumspection, with more caution than courage, and more cunning than generosity.

AJAX. It is my boast ; 90
I'll not deny it.

MIN. Did the Atridæ feel
Thy vengeful arm ?

AJAX. They never will again
Dishonour Ajax.

MIN. If I understand thee,
They are both dead.

AJAX. They are ; now let them come
And take my arms away.

MIN. But tell me, Ajax ; 95
Laertes' son, hath he escaped thy wrath ?

AJAX. Talk'st thou of him, that fox accursed ?

MIN. I mean
Thy foe, Ulysses.

AJAX. O ! he is my captive,
The fairest of my spoils ; I have him here ;
He shall not perish yet.

MIN. What 'vantage then 100
Mean'st thou to draw from his confinement ?

AJAX. First,
I'll have him bound to the pillar.

MIN. And what then
Wouldst thou inflict ?

AJAX. His limbs all purpled o'er
With many a bloody strife, he shall be slain.

MIN. Do not torment him thus.

AJAX. In all things else, 105
Minerva, would I gratify thy will ;
But this, and this alone, must be his fate.

MIN. Since 'tis so pleasing to thee, be it so,
Nor quit thy purpose.

AJAX. I must to my work ;
Thus, great Minerva, mayst thou ever smile 110
Propitious on me, and assist thy Ajax ! [Exit.

MINERVA, ULYSSES.

MIN. Behold, Ulysses, here the mighty strength

Of power divine; lived there a man more wise,
More famed for noble deeds, than Ajax was?

ULYS. None, none indeed; alas! I pity him; 115
Ev'n in a foe I pity such distress,
For he is wedded to the worst of woes:
His hapless state reminds me of my own,
And tells me that frail mortals are no more
Than a vain image and an empty shade. 120

MIN. Let such examples teach thee to beware
Against the gods thou utter aught profane;
And if perchance in riches or in power
Thou shinest superior, be not insolent;
For, know, a day sufficeth to exalt 125
Or to depress the state of mortal man;
The wise and good are by the gods beloved,
But those who practise evil they abhor. [*Exeunt.*]

CHORUS.

To thee, O Ajax, valiant son
Of illustrious Telamon, 130
Monarch of the sea-girt isle,
Fair Salamis, if Fortune smile
On thee, I raise the tributary song,
For praise and virtue still to thee belong;
But when, inflicted by the wrath of Jove, 135
Grecian slander blasts thy fame,
And foul reproach attaints thy name,
Then do I tremble like the fearful dove.

So the last unhappy night,
Clamours loud did reach mine ear 140
And filled my anxious heart with fear,
Which talk'd of Grecian cattle slain,
And Ajax maddening o'er the plain,
Pleased at his prey, rejoicing at the sight.

129 The chorus is formed, with great propriety, of Salaminian soldiers, the countrymen and followers of Ajax, who, having heard the report, already spread through the army, of Ajax's madness, and the slaughter of the cattle, express the deepest concern for their unhappy master.

AJAX.—ACT I.

Thus false Ulysses can prevail, 14
 Whispering to all his artful tale,
 His tale, alas! too willingly received;
 While those who hear are glad to know,
 And happy to insult thy wo;
 For, who asperse the great are easily believed. 150

The poor, like us, alone are free
 From the darts of calumny,
 While envy still attends on high estate;
 Small is the aid which we can lend
 Without the rich and powerful friend; 155
 The great support the low, the low assist the great;
 But 'tis a truth which fools will never know.

From such alone the clamours came
 Which strove to hurt thy spotless fame, 159
 While we can only weep, and not believe thy wo.
 Happy to 'scape thy piercing sight,
 Behold them wing their rapid flight,
 As trembling birds from hungry vultures fly:
 Sudden again shouldst thou appear,
 The cowards would be mute with fear, 165
 And all their censures in a moment die.

Cynthia, goddess of the grove,
 Daughter of immortal Jove,
 Whom at Tauris frequent altars rise, 170
 Indignant might inspire the deed,
 And bid the guiltless cattle bleed,
 Driven of incense due, and wonted sacrifice,
 Haps, sad cause of all our grief and shame!
 The god of war, with brazen shield,
 For fancied injuries in the field, 175
 It thus avenge the wrong, and brand thy name:

For, never, in his perfect mind,
 Had Ajax been to ill inclined:
 Rocks and herds his rage had never spent:
 It was inflicted from above. 180
 May Phœbus and all-powerful Jove
 The crime, or stop the punishment!

If to the Atridæ the bold fiction came
 From Sisyphus' detested race,
 No longer, Ajax, hide thy face, 185
 But from thy tents come forth, and vindicate thy
 fame.

Ajax, thy too long repose
 Adds new vigour to thy foes,
 As flames from aiding winds still fiercer grow ;
 While the loose laugh, and shameless lie, 190
 And all their bitter calumny,
 With double weight oppress, and fill our hearts
 with wo.

ACT II.

TECMESSA, CHORUS.

TEC. Sons of Erectheus, of Athenian race,
 Ye brave companions of the valiant Ajax,
 Oppress'd with grief behold a wretched woman, 195
 Far from her native soil, appointed here
 To watch your hapless lord, and mourn his fate.

CHO. What new misfortune hath the night brought
 forth ?

Say, daughter of Teleutas ! for with thee,
 His captive bride, the noble Ajax deigns 200
 To share the nuptial bed ; and therefore thou
 Canst best inform us.

184 Or, in other words, from Ulysses, whom the chorus means
 to reproach as the reputed son of Sisyphus.

193 Erectheus is reported to have been the offspring of Vulcan
 and the earth ; and from him the Athenians boasted their descent.
 Salamis was not far from Athens ; Sophocles therefore salutes
 the followers of Ajax by the name of Athenians. For joining
 the inhabitants of Salamis to the Athenians, Sophocles had the
 authority of Homer.

199 Teleutas was a petty king in Phrygia, whose dominions
 being taken and plundered by Ajax, his daughter, Tecmessa, be-
 came the victor's captive, and by her he had a son named Eury-
 saces.

How shall I describe.

Than death, the murderer we
sight, with madness armed, hath ALEXANDER
slain dead within this happy house. His
sins o'erspread with bloody garments
to stain the victims of his rage.

Bad news indeed that brings it if that news
be true :

disease, and not by human art
removed : already CASSIUS hath heard. His
undering crown upon the forehead lies.
I fear the worst. I fear no more.
With their locks and brows the sanguine
stain;

it himself he left his murderous hand.

Alas ! this way is not his customary. His
sins he knew, and others that he sought
out the flock that came if sinners were
not : from one the heart and tongue proceed,
at those from him. From the other, sinners
to the pulpit, with a burning zeal.

And

red stripes, and heavier punishments.

Not from mortal cause, but were imposed

at avenging god with some meritorious sin.

Now then, my friends, for at the time be-
mused.

For his hand should cast the mortal coil. His

stand by, or to our ships repair.

And with speed : for dreadful are the tempests

Atride : death may be our lot.

We shall meet an equal punishment

sin whom we knowest, our friends have.

He raves not now : but, like the southern

blast.

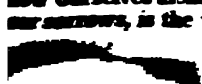
Lightnings cease and all the storm is over.

Is calm again : yet, to his sense returned,

his new griefs : for, O ! to be unhappy,

now ourselves alone the guilty cause.

our sorrows, is the work of woe.



CHO. Yet if his rage subside, we should rejoice :
The ill removed, we should remove our care.

TEC. Hadst thou then rather, if the choice were
given,
Thyself at ease, behold thy friend in pain, 240
Than with thy friend be join'd in mutual sorrow ?

CHO. The double grief is sure the most oppressive.

TEC. Therefore, though not distemper'd, I am
wretched.

CHO. I understand thee not.

TEC. The noble Ajax,
While he was mad, was happy in his phrensy, 245
And yet the while affected me with grief
Who was not so ; but now his rage is o'er,
And he has time to breathe from his misfortune,
Himself is almost dead with grief, and I
Not less unhappy than I was before. 250
Is it not double, then ?

CHO. It is indeed ;
And much I fear the wrath of angry Heaven,
If from his madness ceased he yet receive
No kind relief.

TEC. 'Tis so ; and 'twere most fit
You knew it well.

CHO. Say then how it began ; 255
For, like thyself, we feel for his misfortunes.

TEC. Since you partake the sorrows of a friend,
I'll tell you all : know then, at dead of night,
What time the evening tapers were expired,
Snatching his sword, he seem'd as if he meant 260
To roam abroad : I saw and chid him for it :
" What wouldst thou do," I cried, " my dearest Ajax !
Unask'd, uncall'd for, whither wouldst thou go ?
No trumpet sounds to battle ; the whole host
Is wrapp'd in sleep." Then did he answer me 265
With brief but sharp rebuke, as he was wont,—
" Woman, thy sex's noblest ornament
Is silence." Thus reproved, I said no more ;
Then forth he rush'd alone, where, and for what,

I knew not ; but returning, he brought home, 270
 In chains the captive herd : in pieces some
 He tore, while others, bound like slaves, he lash'd
 Indignant ; then out at the portal ran,
 And with some shadow seem'd to hold discourse ;
 Against the Atridæ and Ulysses oft 275
 Would he inveigh ; or, laughing loud, rejoice
 That he had ta'en revenge for all his wrongs :
 Then back he came. At length, by slow degrees,
 His phrensy ceased ; when, soon as he beheld
 The tents o'erwhelm'd with slaughter, he cried out,
 And beat his brain ; roll'd o'er the bloody heaps 281
 Of cattle slain, and tore his clotted hair,
 Long fixed in silence : then, with horrid threats,
 He bade me tell him all that had befallen,
 And what he had been doing : I obey'd, 285
 Trembling with fear, and told him all I knew.
 Instant he poured forth bitterest lamentations,
 Such as I ne'er had heard from him before ;
 For grief like that, he oft would say, betray'd
 A weak and little mind ; and therefore ever, 290
 When sorrow came, refrain'd from loud complaint ;
 And, like the lowing heifer, inly mourn'd.
 But sinking now beneath this sore distress,
 He will not taste of food or nourishment ;
 Silent he sits, amid the slaughter'd cattle ; 295
 Or, if he speaks, utters such dreadful words
 As show a mind intent on something ill.
 Now then, my friends (for therefore came I hither),
 O ! if ye have the power, assist me now :
 Perhaps ye may ; for oft the afflicted man 300
 Will listen to the counsels of a friend.

CHO. O daughter of Teleutas, horrible
 Indeed thy tidings are of noble Ajax,
 Thus raving, and thus miserable.

AJAX. [*within, groans.*] O !

TEC. Louder you'll hear him soon. Mark'd ye, my
 friends, 305
 How deep his groans !

AJAX. [*within.*] O me!

CHO. He seems to rave,
Or mourns, reflecting on his madness pass'd.

AJAX. [*within.*] Boy! boy!

TEO. Alas! he calls Eurysaces
Where art thou, child? What would he have with
thee?

AJAX. [*within.*] Teucer, 'tis thee I call; where art
thou, Teucer? 310
Still must he chase his prey, while Ajax dies?

CHO. He seems of perfect mind: open the doors:
Let him come forth. Who knows but sight of us
May keep him so?

TEO. I'll open them: now see
[*The doors are thrown open and Ajax discovered.*]
Your master there, and judge of his condition. 311

AJAX, TECMESSA, CHORUS.

AJAX. My dear companions, who alone deserve.
The name of friends, ye see the dreadful storm
How it o'erwhelms me.

CHO. What thou saidst, alas! [*aside to Tecmessa.*]
Was but too true: he seems indeed distracted.

AJAX. My fellow-sailors! whose assisting hand
Plied the tough oar, and led me through the main; 321
From you alone can I expect to meet
Or love or friendship; therefore show it now,
And kill me.

CHO. Talk not thus, nor thus increase
By added woes thy dreadful malady. 325

AJAX. Dost thou behold this once intrepid Ajax,
The brave, the mighty, long for strength renown'd
And dauntless courage in the bloody field;—
Dost thou behold him? O, what laughter now,
What vile reproach must he sustain!

TEO. O Ajax, 330
My lord, my master, do not talk thus sadly.

AJAX. [*to Tecmessa.*] Wilt thou not home? Wilt
not be gone?

Tuo. O me !

Cho. Be patient ; by the gods, let me entreat thee,
Be more composed.

AJAX. Wretch that I was, to let
The cursed Atridæ 'scape, and shed the blood 335
Of harmless cattle !

Cho. But why sorrow thus
For what is past, and cannot be recalled ?

AJAX. How will that subtle instrument of ill,
Laertes' prying son, insult me now,
And smile at my misfortunes !

Cho. That must be 340
As seems most fitting to the gods ; from them
Or grief or joy must flow.

AJAX. O, would to Heaven
That I could see him, wretched as I am !

Cho. This is no time for boasting : see'st thou not
How very weak thou art !

AJAX. Almighty Jove ! 345
My great progenitor ! O grant me this :
Grant me to slay that hateful, talking slave,
With the proud princes ; then, well pleased, myself
Should perish last.

Tuo. O ! if thou pray'st for death,
Pray too for mine ; for wherefore should I live 350
When thou art gone ?

AJAX. O darkness, my best light
And hope ! O wrap me in thy friendly shade,
A willing guest ! I dare not look for help,
Or from the gods above, or men below :
The powerful daughter of eternal Jove 355
To death devotes me. Whither can I fly,
Or where remain, my fame and glory lost
In this sad phrensy ! left without a friend,
And the whole army bent on my destruction !

346 Ajax was the son of Telamon, the son of Æacus, the son
of Jove : Jupiter therefore was his great-grandfather.

SOPH.—C

Tec. Alas ! how dreadful 'tis to hear such words
Which Ajax never would have spoke before ! 36

AJAX. Ye well-known floods that roll into the
main !

Ye caves and forests by the rocky shore !
Years heap'd on years, fast by the walls of Troy
Have ye detain'd me ; but no longer now 36
Among the living shall ye ever see

The hapless Ajax. This remember all :
Nor shall thy neighbouring waves, Scamander, sti
To Greece beneficent, behold me more :

Troy never saw (forgive the boastful word !) 37
A braver, nobler foe than Ajax was,
Though now dishonour'd thus, and thus oppress'd.

Cho. I would not have thee thus lament thy woes
And yet I know not how to chide thee for it,
So hard thy lot.

AJAX. Who would have thought my name
Would e'er so well have suited my condition ! 37

O ! I have reason to lament indeed,
For sure there is not such a wretch as Ajax !
Long since at Troy my valiant father fought,
And to his native land, with glory crown'd, 38
Bore back the meed of his distinguish'd virtues :
Nor less renown'd for gallant deeds was once
His hapless son, though now he perish thus
Inglorious : yet Achilles, well I know,
Were he alive, and to bestow his arms 38

On him who best deserved the prize, to me,
And me alone, would judge the great reward :
But little deemed the Atridae worth like mine,
And therefore gave them to that vile impostor,
Author of every evil work, Ulysses. 38

Had not my mind been wrought on by some power
Superior, and my eyes averted from them,

375 To know the meaning of this passage, the reader should understand Greek ; it being nothing more than a poor pun on the name of Ajax, which in the original begins with *Ai*, an exclamation like our O ! expressive of pain and sorrow.

had not lived to give another sentence ;
 re's great daughter, the invincible,
 eadful Pallas, turn'd my arm aside, 395
 ised against them, and inspired me thus
 orrid rage to dip my murderous hand
 d of guiltless cattle ; they, meantime,
 at the danger 'scaped, and triumph o'er me ;
 hen the gods oppose us, valour bends 400
 vardice, and strength to weakness yields ;
 hen can Ajax, hateful to the gods,
 y detested, and by Greece forsaken ?

go leave the Atridæ here alone
 at their cause, and seek my native land ? 405
 w shall I appear before my father,
 ill he bear to see his Ajax thus
 d of his honours,—he who ever crown'd
 lory sits ? It must not, cannot be.

if I rush amid the Trojan host, 410
 ith my single arm oppose them all ;
 ething noble, and as nobly perish ?
 at would please the Atridæ ; therefore never
 t be done. No, I will do a deed,
 ow my father that I still deserve 415
 ame of son, and emulate my sire.

life but teems with unremitted woes,
 or in man to wish a longer date :
 at can day on day, and year on year,
 t off wish'd-for death, and lengthen pain ? 420
 e worth is he who still depends
 itless hope ; for it becomes the brave
 e with honour, or to die with glory !
 re my thoughts.

Thoughts not unworthy of thee,
 but quit, O ! quit thy horrid purpose, 425
 ield thee to thy friends.

My lord, my master,
 arest Ajax, dreadful are the ills
 i cruel Fortune brings on human kind.
 est race (a better Phrygia boasts not)
 ssa was, and from a father sprung, 430

Happy and free, though now a wretched slave ;
 For so the gods and thy all-conquering arm
 Decreed : but since, partaker of thy bed,
 Thou knowest I ever have with tenderest care
 Watch'd o'er thee ; therefore, by domestic Jove ! 435
 Here I entreat thee, by the sacred tie
 That binds us, let me not with foul reproach
 And bitter scorn be taunted by thy foes,
 When they surround me, as I know they will :
 For, O ! when thou shalt die, that very day 440
 The Greeks with violence will seize on me :
 Tecmessa, then, and thy loved son, shall eat
 The bread of slavery ; then some haughty lord,
 Insulting loud, shall cry, " Behold the wife
 Of Ajax, once the pride of all our host ! 445
 How is she fallen from envied happiness
 To servitude and wo ! " Such vile upbraidings
 Oft shall I hear, on thee and on thy race
 Casting foul shame. O, then, relent, my Ajax !
 Think on thy father in the vale of years ; 450
 Think on thy aged mother, who with vows
 Incessant prays the gods to send thee back
 Safe to thy native land ; pity thy son,
 Without a father in his tender youth
 To form his mind, left to the unfriendly hands 455
 Of those who love him not. Alas ! what woes
 Wilt thou bequeath to me and to thy child !
 I have no hope, no stay, but thee alone !
 Thy hand destroy'd my country and my mother ;
 Death snatch'd my father to the realms below : 460
 Deprived of thee, what country will receive me,
 Or where shall I subsist ? Thou art my all,
 My only safeguard : do not, do not leave me !
 Naught so becomes a man as gratitude
 For good received, and noble deeds are still 465
 The offspring of benevolence ; while he
 With whom remembrance dies of blessings past,
 Is vile and worthless.

CHO. O, that thou couldst feel
 Pity like mine for this unhappy woman !

Then, wouldst thou say her words deserve thy
praise. 470

AJAX. And praised she shall be, if she but perform
What I require.

TEC. In all I will obey thee,
My dearest Ajax!

AJAX. I would see my child;
Let him be brought.

TEC. I hid him from thy sight
Because of—

AJAX. My distemper, was it not? 475

TEC. It was: I fear'd, indeed, thou mightst de-
stroy him.

AJAX. And well thou mightst: a deed like that
became
My sad condition.

TEC. Therefore, to prevent it,
I kept him from thee.

AJAX. I approve thy caution.

TEC. What wouldst thou have me do?

AJAX. Let me behold 480
And speak to him.

TEC. He is not far from hence;
The servants have him in their care.

AJAX. Then why
May I not see him?

TEC. Boy! thy father calls thee;
Let some one bring him hither.

AJAX. Is he coming?
Doth he not hear thee?

TEC. They have brought him to thee. 485
[Enter servants with Eurysaces.]

EURYSACES, TEOMESSA, AJAX, CHORUS.

AJAX. Bring him this way; for if he be the son
Of Ajax, the fresh blood that hangs about me
Will not affright him: he must learn, like me,
In earliest years the savage laws of war,
And be inured to scenes of death and slaughter. 490

Mayst thou, my boy, be happier than thy father !
 In all things else it will be no disgrace
 To copy me. I envy thee, my child,
 For that thou seest not thy own wretchedness ;
 The happiness of life is not to know. 495
 Thy ignorance will keep thee free from pain,
 Till time shall teach thee what it is to grieve
 And to rejoice ; then must thou show thy foes
 From whom thou art descended. May the breath
 Of life, meantime, nourish thy tender frame, 500
 That thou mayst prove a comfort to thy mother !
 I know there's not a Grecian that will dare
 Insult thee, when thy father is no more ;
 For I shall leave thee to the best of guardians,
 The faithful Teucer, who, far from thee now, 505
 Sent forth by Greece, repels the invading foe.
 Of you, my friends, companions of the war,
 The only boon I ask is, that ye urge
 This last request to Teucer ; say, I begg'd
 That straight to Telamon and Eribea, 510
 My aged parents, he would bear my child,
 To be the joy of their declining years,
 Till death shall call them to the shades below.
 Let not my arms by Greece, or by that plague,
 Ulysses, e'er be made the prize of glory 515
 For rival chiefs : but do thou take, my boy,
 [Turning to Eurysaces.
 The seven-fold, vast, impenetrable shield,
 Whose name thou bear'st ; the rest be buried with me.
 Take hence the child with speed ; nor in the tents
 Let there be wailings : women ever love 520
 To brood o'er sorrows, and indulge their wo.
 Shut to the door. The wound that must be cut
 No wise physician will attempt to heal
 With incantation, elegy, or song.

518 The name of Eurysaces is derived from two Greek words, signifying "a broad shield." The custom of burying the arms of deceased warriors in the same grave with them is very ancient, and is practised among the Indians at this day.

CHO. I tremble when I hear thee threatening thus
With sharp and piercing voice.

TEC. Alas! my lord, 526

What wilt thou do?

AJAX. Guess not; inquire not of me;
Be silent, and be wise; it will become thee.

TEC. How am I tortured! by the gods, I beg thee,
By our dear child, do not destroy us both. 530

AJAX. Thou dost perplex me. Why revere the
gods?

I am not bound to it, for I owe them nothing.

TEC. Be not so impious.

AJAX. Talk to those will hear thee.

TEC. Art thou resolved then?

AJAX. 'Tis too much; thy grief
Grows troublesome.

TEC. Alas! my lord, I fear— 535

AJAX. [*to the chorus.*] Will ye not take her hence?

TEC. O! by the gods
I beg thee, be persuaded.

AJAX. Thou art mad
To think thy words will ever change my purpose.
[*Exeunt.*]

ODE.—CHORUS.

STROPHE.

O happiest, best abode, my native isle,
Fair Salamis, encompass'd by the sea, 540
On thee while gods and men indulgent smile,
My country, O behold and pity me!
A long, long time on Ida's plain,
Thus doom'd inglorious to remain,
While circling years roll o'er my wretched head: 545
New terrors still affright me here;
Still is my heart appall'd with fear,
Lest I should visit soon the mansions of the dead.

ANTISTROPHE.

The woes of Ajax too im bitter mine,
The bravest leader of the Grecian host, 550

Untimely visited by wrath divine,
 And in the desperate, cruel phrensy lost.
 There was a time when, sent by thee,
 He gain'd the wreath of victory,
 Though now his weeping friends lament his fall. 555
 The ungrateful chiefs revere no more
 The virtues they admired before :
 His gallant deeds are now forgotten all.

STROPHE II.

Weigh'd down with years, when thou, in hoary age,
 Unhappy mother, shalt these tidings hear 560
 Of the dear Ajax, and his cruel rage,
 How wilt thou weep and wail with grief sincere !
 Not like the plaintive nightingale
 That warbles sweet her tender tale,
 But with loud shrieks of horrible despair : 565
 With sharpest anguish sore oppress'd
 Then shalt thou beat thy aged breast,
 And in deep sorrow rend thy wild dishevell'd hair.

ANTISTROPHE II.

'Tis better far to die, than, hopeless still
 Of cure, to languish under sore disease ; 570
 When mortals suffer such distinguish'd ill,
 The silent tomb is liberty and ease.
 Ajax, the pride of all our host,
 His ancient fame and glory lost,
 Sinks down at last o'erwhelm'd with foul disgrace :
 How will his hapless father bear 575
 His son's distressful fate to hear,
 Ev'n such as never fell on Æacus' race.

ACT III.

AJAX, TECMESSA, CHORUS.

AJAX. Still are the secret things of man reveal'd,
 And what is known, again in darkness hid, 580
 By endless and immeasurable time ;
 And nothing is there, but in length and days
 May come to pass : ev'n sacred oaths are broken ;

And the fix'd mind, perverse and obstinate,
 Subdued by time. I, who like harden'd steel 585
 Was late inflexible, am softened now
 To pity and remorse by this dear woman :
 I cannot bear to leave her here a widow
 Amid her foes, or to forsake my child,
 A helpless orphan. No ; I will retire 590
 Along the shore, and seek the running stream,
 Avert the wrath of angry Heaven, and wash
 My crimes away ; there haply shall I find
 Some unfrequented spot where I may hide
 This fatal weapon, this destructive sword. 595
 O ! I will bury it deep in earth, that none
 May see it more ; but Night and Erebus
 Preserve it still from every mortal eye.
 E'er since that hapless day when from the hand
 Of Hector I received this dreadful boon, 600
 Naught have I had from Greece but pain and wo :
 True is the adage, " From the hands of foes
 Gifts are not gifts, but injuries most fatal."
 Hereafter will I yield me to the gods
 And the Atridæ : since they are my masters, 605
 'Tis meet that I obey them : all that is strong
 And mighty must submit to powers superior.
 Doth not the snowy winter to the bloom
 Of fruitful summer yield ? and night obscure,
 When by white steeds Aurora drawn, lights up 610
 The rising day, submissively retire ?
 The roaring sea, long vex'd by angry winds,
 Is lull'd by milder zephyrs to repose ;
 And oft the fetters of all-conq'ring sleep
 Are kindly loosed to free the captive mind. 615
 From Nature, then, who thus instructs mankind,
 Why should not Ajax learn humility ?
 Long since I knew to treat my foe like one
 Whom I hereafter, as a friend might love,
 If he deserved it ; and to love my friend 620
 As if he still might one day be my foe :
 For little is the trust we can repose

In human friendships : but to my intent.
 Go thou, Tecmessa, and beseech the gods
 To grant what I request ; do you perform 625
 The same kind office ; and when Teucer comes,
 Tell him the care of me and of my friends
 I leave to him : whither I must, I must.
 Obey my orders : wretched as I am,
 Soon shall ye see me freed from all my woes. 630
[*Exeunt.*]

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

Now let sounds of mirth and joy
 Every blissful hour employ :
 Borne on pleasure's airy wing,
 Io Pan ! to thee we sing ;
 Thee, whom on the rocky shore, 635
 Wreck-'scaped mariners adore,
 Skill'd the mazy dance to lead ;
 Teach, O ! teach our feet to tread
 The round which Cretan Cnossus knows,
 At Nyssa, which spontaneous rose, 640
 Pan, O ! guide this tuneful throng,
 While to thee we raise the song
 From Cyllene's snowy brow :
 King of pleasures, hear us now !
 From thy mountains, O ! appear : 645
 Joy and happiness are here :
 And do thou, O Delian king,
 Now thy aid propitious bring !
 O ! from the Icarian sea,
 Come, Apollo, smile on me. 650

ANTISTROPHE.

All our sorrows now are o'er ;
 Grief and madness are no more :
 See, the happy day appears,
 Mighty Jove ! that ends our fears.
 Let us, free from every care, 655
 Gladly to our ships repair :

Ajax now in sweet repose
 Sinks, forgetful of his woes ;
 Humbly to the gods resigned,
 He devotes his better mind : 660
 Time, that withers, can restore
 Human pleasures : now no more
 Must we say our vows are vain :
 Naught unhoped for should remain ;
 Since, beyond our wishes, see 665
 Ajax from his madness free ;
 'Gainst th' Atridæ all his rage
 See how milder thoughts assuage.
 Bitter strife and quarrels cease ;
 All is harmony and peace. 670

MESSENGER, CHORUS.

Mrs. My friends, I bear you news of highest import :

From Mysia's rocky mountains hither comes
 The noble Teucer : know, ev'n now I saw him
 Amid the Grecian host, who, as he came,
 Surrounded, and on every side pour'd forth 675
 Reproaches on him : not a man but cried,
 " Behold the brother of that frantic foe
 To Greece and to her council." Such their rage
 That they had well-nigh stoned him ; swords were
 drawn,

And dire had been the conflict, but that some 680
 Among the aged chiefs, by calm advice,
 Appeased the strife : but where is Ajax gone ?
 That I may tell him : from our masters naught
 Should be concealed.

Cho. He is not now within,
 But just steps forth, as if on some new act 685
 Intent, well suited to his better mind.

Mrs. Alas ! too late did Teucer send me here,
 Or I am come too slowly.

Cho. Why regret
 His absence thus ?

MES. 'Twas Teucer's strict command
He should be kept within the tent, nor stir 690
Till he arrived.

CHO. But, to his sense restor'd,
He went to deprecate the wrath divine,
And expiate his offence.

MES. Thy words are vain,
If Calchas prophesy aright.

CHO. What then 694
Did Calchas say? Dost thou know aught of this?

MES. Thus far I know, for I was witness of it:
Calchas, retiring from the assembled chiefs,
Apart from the Atridæ, gently press'd
The hand of Teucer, and in tenderest friendship
Besought him, that by every human art 700
And means to be devised he would prevent
Ajax's wandering forth this fatal day,
If he did ever wish to see him more:
This day alone, he said, Minerva's wrath
Would last against him. Oft the mighty fall 706
In deep affliction, smit by angry Heaven,
When, mortal born, to human laws they yield not,
As mortals ought, submissively. Thus spake
The prophet, and long since was Ajax deem'd
To have a mind disturb'd. When first he left 710
His native soil,—“Be conqueror, O my child!”
His father said; “but conquer under God.”
Impious and proud his answer was: “The worst
Of men,” he cried, “assisted by the gods, 714
May conquer: I shall do the work without them!”
Such were his boastings: and when Pallas once,
With kind assistance, urged him to the fight,
Dreadful and horrible was his reply:
“Go, queen, to other Grecians lend thy aid;
’Tis needless here; for know, where Ajax is, 720
The foe will never come.” By words like these,
And pride ill suited to a mortal's power,
Did he offend the vengeful deity:
But if he lives, we may preserve him still,

The gods assisting ; so the prophet spake ; 735
 And Teucer bade me say you all should try
 To keep him here : but if that cannot be,
 And Calchas judge aright, he is no more.

CHO. [*to Tecmessa within.*] What, ho ! Tecmessa,
 most unhappy woman ! 729
 Come forth, and hear the tidings that he brings :
 They wound us deep, and all our joys are gone.

TECMESSA, MESSENGER, CHORUS.

TEC. Scarce do I breathe from still repeated woes,
 And now again thou call'st me : wherefore ? speak !

CHO. This messenger hath brought us dreadful
 news
 Concerning Ajax : hear him.

TEC. O ! what is it ! 735
 Am I undone ?

MES. I know not what thou art ;
 But if thy Ajax be gone forth, my fears
 Are great for him.

TEC. Alas ! he is ; but why ?
 How thou afflict'st me !

MES. Teucer hath forbid
 His wandering thus alone.

TEC. But why forbade him ?
 And where is Teucer ?

MES. He will soon be here : 741
 He fears this fatal day.

TEC. Undone Tecmessa !
 Whence are his fears ? Who told him 'twould be
 fatal !

MES. The historian Calchas did foretel this day
 To life or death would fix the fate of Ajax. 745

TEC. [*to the Chorus.*] Assist me, friends, in this
 distressful hour :

To Teucer hasten, and bring him to my aid.
 Some to yon western mountain bend your way,
 And some to the east ; find out which path he went.
 Unhappy wanderer ! O ! he has deceived me, 750
 SOPH.—D

His former love forgotten all, and gone.
 What must we do, my child? I must not sit
 Inactive here: no, wheresoe'er I can,
 I'll go to search him: let us haste, my friends.
 Quick, fly this instant, if we mean to save
 The wretched Ajax rushing on destruction.
 CHO. Behold us ready, not in word alone,
 But bent with speed to follow thee. Away.
 [Exit

ACT IV.

AJAX.

THERE stands my sword, and fix'd as it may be
 Perform its office; 'twas the gift of Hector,
 My worst of foes, whom I detested ever.
 The steel-devouring stone hath sharpen'd well
 Its keenest edge: buried in Trojan earth
 It lies, and now in kindness seems prepared
 To end my wretched life: thus far is well.
 And now, O Jove! (for first to thee 'tis fit
 We pay due honours) I address my prayer:
 I ask not much; I ask thee but to send
 Some passing stranger here to bear the news
 Of my unhappy fate to Teucer's ear,
 That he may first behold and take me hence;
 Lest, by my foes discover'd, I be cast
 A prey to dogs and birds: forbid it, Jove!
 Thee too, great leader of departed souls,
 Terrestrial Hermes, thee I call. O! hear me;
 With easy steps, and swift, conduct me safe
 To my abode, soon as this fatal sword
 Shall reach my breast; and you, ye virgin Powers
 From whom whate'er befalls of human ill
 Cannot be hid; ye goddesses revered,
 Swift to pursue the guilty;—O! behold
 The wretched Ajax by the Atridæ fall!
 O! seize the murderous! By my own sad hand
 As I shall perish, let my foes be slain

By those whom most they love ! Quick, fly, begone,
 Ye vengeful Furies ; gorge yourselves in blood, 786
 Nor spare a man of all the Grecian host.
 And thou, O Sun ! who drivest the flaming car
 Along the vaulted sky ; when thou shalt see
 My native soil, O ! stop thy golden reins ; 790
 Tell the sad story to my hapless sire,
 And my afflicted mother : when she hears
 The mournful tale, her grief will fill the land
 With dreadful lamentations : but 'tis vain
 To weep my fate ; the business must be done. 795
 O Death ! look on me, Death ! I come to thee :
 Soon shall we meet : but thee, O glorious Day,
 And yon bright charioteer, the Sun, no more
 Shall I behold : ev'n now thou hear'st my last,
 My dying words. O Light ! O sacred soil 800
 Of Salamis, my country, and her gods !
 O noble Athens ! O my loved companions !
 Ye rivers, fountains, and fair fields of Troy !
 And you, my honour'd parents ! O, farewell !
 'Tis the last word Ajax shall speak on earth : 805
 The rest be utter'd to the shades below.

[Ajax falls on his sword, and dies.]

CHORUS.

SEMICHOR. I. Labour on labour ! toil on toil ! O, whither
 Have we not wander'd ? yet no place informs us
 Where Ajax is : but soft, I hear a voice.
 SEMICHOR. II. 'Twas ours, your friends.
 SEMICHOR. I. What news ?
 SEMICHOR. II. We've search'd along 810
 The western shore.
 SEMICHOR. I. And is he found ?
 SEMICHOR. II. Alas !
 We met with naught but toil ; no sight of him.
 SEMICHOR. I. We from the east return with like success ;
 For none have seen or heard of him that way.

SEMICHOR. II. Who will inform us ? who will say 81
 Where cruel Ajax bent his way ?
 Will not the watchful hind, who, void of sleep,
 Hangs laborious o'er the deep ?
 From high Olympus will no pitying god,
 Will no kind naiad of the flood, 82
 If chance they see the cruel Ajax stray,
 Tell us where he bent his way ?
 For O ! 'tis dreadful, wearied thus, to rove,
 While all our pains successless prove
 To reach the destined goal, or find the man we love

TEC. [*from within.*] Alas ! alas ! 83

SEMICHOR. I. Hark ! from the neighbouring grove
 I heard a voice.

SEMICHOR. II. It is the wretched captive,
 The wife of Ajax ; the poor, sad Tecmessa.

TECMESSA, CHORUS.

TEC. O ! I am lost, my friends ! undone, destroy !

CHO. Ha ! what hath happen'd !

TEC. Ajax lies before me, 84
 Slain by the sword which he has buried here.

CHO. Fatal, sure, was our return,
 Thy untimely death to mourn,
 Me, and all thy faithful train,
 Cruel Ajax, hast thou slain ; 85
 Sad event, alas ! to me ;
 Sadder, woman ! still to thee.

TEC. O ! I have reason now to weep, indeed.

CHO. What hand perform'd the horrid deed ?

TEC. His own 86
 Doubtless it was ; the sword he fell upon,
 Here fix'd in earth, declares it must be so.

CHO. [*approaching towards the body.*]
 Alone, without one pitying friend,
 Camest thou to this dreadful end ;
 Was I not myself to blame,
 Who, neglectful, never came ? 87
 Bring him, Tecmessa, to my eyes ;
 Tell me where thy Ajax lies.

TEC. He is not to be seen : this folded garment
 Shall hide the horrid sight ;—a sight no friend 849
 Would wish to see ; while from his nostrils stream
 The black blood, more still issuing from the wound,
 Made by his own destructive hand. O me !

What must I do ? what friend will raise him up ?
 O ! where is Teucer ? He should have been here
 To pay his last sad duty to a brother. 855
 O wretched Ajax ! but to think, alas !

What once thou hast been, and what now thou art,
 Thy very foes must sure lament thy fate.

CHO. Ajax, long since, in thy obdurate mind,
 Thy sad purpose was design'd ; 860
 Long since wert thou resolved to seek repose
 From thy never-ceasing woes.

This from the daily sigh, the nightly tear,
 This from thy sorows did I fear :
 This from thy hate, which naught could e'er assuage ;
 And 'gainst the Atridæ all thy rage : 866

For never did thy soul contentment know,
 But still with fiercest indignation glow,
 Since great Achilles' arms were given to thy foe.

TEC. O me !

CHO. Alas ! I know the wound must pierce 870
 Thy inmost soul.

TEC. Unhappy, lost Tecmessa !

CHO. O ! I believe thou art indeed unhappy,
 Bereaved of such a friend.

TEC. Thou but believ'st it ;
 I am too certain, for I feel it here.

CHO. I know thou dost.

TEC. What servitude, my child, 875
 Must we endure ? Who will protect us now ?

CHO. Doubtless thy fear of future pain
 From the Atridæ all are vain ;
 For never can they mean such ills to thee.
 Unfeeling they of human wo, 880
 Nor love nor piety could know.

May Heaven avert the sad calamity !

TEU. The gods ordain'd it, and it must be so.

CHO. But he hath suffer'd more than he deserved.

TEU. Jove's dreadful daughter, Pallas, so decreed
His fate, to gratify her loved Ulysses. 886

CHO. Ulysses, ever pleased to see

His madness, now will smile at thee ;

Will laugh at Ajax' woes, nor pity thine :

By him the cursed Atridæ led, 890

Perhaps will triumph o'er the dead,

And in the cruel mirth with pleasure join.

TEU. Let them rejoice, let them insult him now
With savage joy ; but when the dreadful day
Of battle comes, whom living they despised, 895
When dead they shall lament : fools never know
The treasure's value till the treasure's lost.

But far more bitter was his death to me,
Than sweet to them : to Ajax 'twas most welcome ;
Death was his only wish, and he obtain'd it : 900

Then wherefore should they triumph ? By the hand
Of Heaven, and not by theirs, my Ajax fell.

Then let Ulysses smile : he is not theirs,
He lives not for the Grecians : he is gone,
And has bequeathed his sorrows all to me. 905

TEUCER, TECMESSA, CHORUS.

TEU. Alas ! Alas !

CHO. Hark ! 'tis the voice of Teucer,
In mournful sighs lamenting our sad fate.

TEU. O Ajax ! is it so ? My dearest brother,
Dear as these eyes to me, hath fame said true,
And art thou gone ?

CHO. O Teucer ! he is dead. 910

TEU. Unhappy fate !

CHO. 'Tis so, indeed.

TEU. Alas !

Wretch that I am !

CHO. O ! thou hast cause to weep

TEU. Dreadful calamity !

CHO. It is, indeed,

Too much to bear

TEU. O wretched, wretched Teucer!
Where is the child? Is he at Troy?

CHO. Alone, 915
And in the tent.

TEU. Will ye not bring him to me,
Lest he should fall a victim to the foe;
Ev'n as the hunters seize the lion's whelp
Left to its helpless dam? Quick! fly! assist me:
For all are glad to triumph o'er the dead. 920

CHO. To thee, O Teucer! he bequeathed the care
Of his loved child, and thou obey'st him well.

TEU. O Ajax! never did these eyes behold
A sight so dreadful. Came I then for this
With luckless speed? O melancholy journey! 925
To seek thee long in vain, and thus at last

To find thee dead before me! O my brother!
Quick through the Grecian host, as if some god
Had brought the tidings, spread the dire report
Of thy untimely fate; far from the world
I heard and wept; but now, alas! too late, 930

And am undone. My best, my dearest Ajax!
Unveil the body; let me view it well,
And count my miseries: horrid spectacle!
O rash, adventurous deed! What weight of woe
Thy death has laid on me! Alas! to whom, 936
Or whither shall I go? O! wherefore, Teucer,
Wert thou not here to stop a brother's hand?

What will our poor unhappy father say,
The wretched Telamon? Will he receive me 940
With looks of love and pleasure, when I come
Without his Ajax! O! he never will.

Ev'n in the best of times he was not wont
To smile or joy in aught: what then will now
His anger vent? Will he not speak of me 945
As of a faithless, base, unworthy son,

The spurious offspring of a captive mother,
Who hath betray'd and slain his best-loved Ajax,
To gain his fair possessions after death?

Thus will his wrath, sharpen'd by peevish age, 950

Upbraid me, guiltless; and to slavery doom'd,
 A wretched exile from his native land,
 Shall Teucer wander forth: such dreadful ills
 Must I expect at home. At Troy, my foes
 Are numerous; and my friends, alas! how few!
 Thou art the cause of all; for, O my Ajax! 95
 What shall I do? How can I save thee now
 From this sad fate? O! who could have foreseen
 That Hector, long since dead, at last should prove
 The murderer of Ajax? By the gods 96
 I do beseech you, mark the fate of both
 The belt which Ajax did to Hector give,
 Dragg'd the brave Trojan o'er the bloody field,
 Till he expired; and now, behold! the sword
 Which Hector gave to Ajax is the cause 96
 Of Ajax' death: Erynnis' self did forge
 The fatal steel, and Pluto made the belt,
 Dreadful artificer! But this, and all
 That happens to us is the work of Heaven:
 If there be those who doubt it, let them hold 97
 Their differing judgments; I shall keep my own.
 CHO. Teucer, no more; but rather now prepare
 To bury Ajax, and defend thyself
 Against thy foe, whom yonder I behold
 This way advancing, with malignant smile, 97
 And looks of ill intent.

TEU. Who can it be?
 From the army, think'st thou?

CHO. 'Tis the man whose cause
 We came to fight, ev'n Menelaus.

TEU. 'Tis so:
 As he approaches nigh, I know him well.

MENELAUS, TEUCER, CHORUS.

MEN. Stop there; to thee I speak: let go the body;
 I will not have it touch'd.

TEU. Why touch it not? 98

MEN. Because it is my will, and his who leads
 The Grecian host.

TEU. But wherefore is it so?

MEN. Greece fondly hoped that she had brought
a friend

And firm ally, but by experience found 985
That Troy herself was not so much our foe
As Ajax was, who nightly wander'd forth
With deadliest rage to murder all our host ;
And, but some god did frustrate his intent,
The fate himself hath met had been our own : 990
Then had he triumphed ; but the gods ordain'd
It should not be, and 'gainst the flocks and herds
Turn'd all his fury : wherefore, know, there lives
not

A man of courage or of power sufficient
To bury Ajax : on the yellow shore 995
He shall be cast, to be the food of birds
That wander there. Thou mayst resent it too,
But 'twill be vain ; at least we will command
When dead, whom living we could ne'er subdue,
Nor ask thy leave : he never would submit, 1000
But now he must : yield, therefore, or we force thee.
'Tis the plebeian's duty to obey

The voice of those who bear authority,
And he who doth not is the worst of men ;
For never can the state itself support 1005
By wholesome laws, where there is no submission.

An army's best defence is modest fear
And reverence of its leaders ; without these
It cannot conquer ; it becomes a man,
How great soe'er his strength, still to remember,
A little, very little, may destroy him. 1011

He, who is guarded by humility
And conscious shame, alone in safety lies ;
But where licentious freedom and reproach
Injurious reign, each as his will directs 1015
Still acting ;—know, that city soon must fall
From all its bliss, and sink in deepest wo.
Remember, then, respect is due to me.
Let us not think, when pleasure is enjoy'd,
We must *not* suffer too and taste of pain ; 1020

For these to mortals still alternate rise.
 There lived not one so proud and arrogant
 As Ajax was : I will be haughty now ;
 It is my turn : take heed then, touch him not,
 Lest, while thou strivest to bury him, thyself 1025
 Shouldst drop into the tomb.

CHO.

O Menelaus !

Do not, with maxims grave, and wisdom's rules,
 Mix foul reproach and slander on the dead.

TEU. It should not move our wonder, O my friend !
 To see the vulgar err, of meaner souls, 1030
 And birth obscure, when men so nobly born
 Will talk thus basely. Tell me, Menelaus !
 (For 'twas thy first assertion) didst thou bring
 Our Ajax here to help the Grecian host,
 Or came he hither by himself alone 1035
 Conducted ? Whence is thy command o'er him,
 Or these his followers ? Who gave thee power ?
 Who gave thee right ? Thou mayst be Sparta's king,
 But art not ours : Ajax was bound by law
 No more to thee than thou wert bound to Ajax ;
 Thyself no general, but to others here 1041
 Subjected, therefore lord it where thou mayst ;
 Command thy slaves ; go threaten and chastise
 them ;

But I will bury Ajax, spite of thee
 And of thy brother, for I heed thee not. 1045
 He sail'd not here to quarrel for the wife
 Of Menelaus like a hireling slave,
 But to fulfil the strictly-binding oath
 Which he had sworn ; he did not come for thee,
 For he despised so poor a cause ; he came 1050

1048 Tyndarus, the father of Helen, obliged all his daughter's
 lovers to take an oath, that on which of them soever the lot
 should fall to marry her, the rest should unite in his defence,
 and, in case of any attempt to carry her off, should join their
 forces to recover her. Teucer, therefore, tells Menelaus that it
 was not any personal regard to him which induced Ajax to join
 the army, but his resolution to fulfil this solemn engagement.

all his heralds, and a numerous train,
ought his captains too; remember, therefore,
labours ne'er shall turn me from my purpose
thou art what thou art.

A tongue like thine
becomes thy state: 'tis most unseemly. 1055

A keen reproach, with justice on its side,
says grating.

This proud archer here
loudly.

'Tis no mean, illiberal art.
If thou couldst bear a shield, how insolent
mighty wouldst thou be, when naked thus
boast'st thy valour!

Naked as I am, 1061
I should not fly from thee with all thy arms.

Thy tongue but speaks thy pride.
I should be proud

I am just.

Doth justice bid me love
who destroy'd me?

And art thou then destroy'd?
strange indeed; living and dead at once. 1066

For him I had been so: the gods preserved
me.

Do not dishonour then the powers divine
saved thee.

Do I violate their laws?
If thou forbid'st the burial of the dead,
lost offend the gods.

He was my foe, 1071
therefore I forbid it.

Art thou sure
Ajax ever was thy foe?

I am:
the war was mutual, and thou know'st the cause.

Homer, whom Sophocles never loses sight of, describes
as a skilful archer.

TEU. Because thou wert corrupted, thy false voice
Condemn'd him.

MEN. 'Twas the judges' fault, not mine. 1076

TEU. Thus mayst thou screen a thousand injuries.

MEN. Some one may suffer for this insolence.

TEU. Not more, perhaps, than others.

MEN. This alone
Remember, buried he shall never be. 1080

TEU. Do thou remember, too, I say he shall.

MEN. So have I seen a bold imperious man,
With forward tongue, before the storm began,
Urging the tardy mariner to sail ; 1084
But when the tempest rose, no more was heard
The coward's voice, but, wrapp'd beneath his cloak,
Silent he laid, and suffer'd every foot
To trample on him : thus it is with thee,
And thy foul tongue ; forth from a little cloud,
Soon as the storm shall burst, it will o'erwhelm thee,
And stop thy clamours.

TEU. I too have beheld 1091
A man with folly sworn, reproach his friends
Oppress'd with sore calamity, when straight
One came like me, with indignation fired ;
Saw, and address'd him thus :—" Cease, shameless
wretch ! 1095

Nor thus oppress the dead ; for if thou dost,
Remember, thou shalt suffer for thy crime."
Thus spake he to the weak, insulting fool :
Methinks I see him here ; it must be he,
Ev'n Menelaus : have I guessed aright ? 1100

MEN. 'Tis well ; I'll leave thee ; 'tis a folly thus
To talk with those whom we have power to punish.
[Exit.]

TEUCER, CHORUS.

TEU. Away ! this babbler is not to be borne.

1075 It is said that in the famous contest between Ajax and Ulysses for the arms of Achilles, the former lost them by the casting vote of Menelaus.

Ceo. The contest will grow warm. O Teucer!
haste,

Prepare some hollow foss for the remains 1105
Of Ajax : raise him there a monument,
By after ages ne'er to be forgotten.

Teu. And lo! in happy hour this way advancing
The wife and son of our unhappy friend,
To pay due honours, and adorn his tomb. 1110

TECMESSA, EURYSACES, TEUCER, CHORUS.

Teu. Come hither, boy! bend down, and touch thy
father :

There sit ; and, holding in thy hands this hair,
And hers, and thine, the suppliant's humble treasure,
Offer thy pious prayers for thy dead father.
If from yon hostile camp the foe should come 1115
To drive thee hence, far from his native land,
Whoe'er he be, unburied may he lie,
From his whole race uprooted, torn away,
Ev'n as this hair which here I cut before thee.
O ! guard it well, my child ! and you, my friends !
Behave like men, assist, protect him now, 1121
Till I return ; and, spite of all our foes,
Perform the rites, and raise a tomb to Ajax.

TECMESSA, EURYSACES, CHORUS.

CHORUS.—STROPHE I.

When will the happy hour appear,
That comes to calm our every fear, 1125
From endless toil to bring us sweet repose,
To bid our weary wanderings cease,
To fold us in the arms of peace,
And put the wish'd-for period to our woes ?
For since the day when first to Troy we came, 1130
Naught have we known but grief, reproach, and
shame.

ANTISTROPHE I.

O ! that the man, who erst, inspired
With horrid rage, our Grecians fired
SOPH.—E

To slaughterous deeds, and taught them first to
 fight,
 E'er he had learn'd the dreadful trade, 1135
 Himself had mingled with the dead,
 Or scatter'd wide in air, or sunk in endless night !
 For O ! from war unnumber'd evils flow,
 The inexhausted source of every human wo.

STROPHE II.

By war disturb'd, the genial board 1140
 No longer will its sweets afford ;
 Their fragrant odours round my head,
 The verdant wreaths no longer spread ;
 Nor music's charms my soul delight,
 Nor love with rapture crowns the night, 1145
 No love, alas ! for me, but grief and care ;
 For when I think of Troy, I still despair,
 And wet with many a tear my wild dishevell'd hair.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Nor nightly fear, nor hostile dart,
 While Ajax lived, appall'd my heart ; 1150
 But all our pleasures now are o'er ;
 The valiant Ajax is no more.
 O ! could I climb the woody steep
 That hangs incumbent o'er the deep,
 From Sunium's cliff by waves for ever beat ! 1155
 Thence should my eye the lovely prospect greet,
 And smile on sacred Athens rising at my feet.

ACT V.

TEUCER, AGAMEMNON, CHORUS.

TEU. This way I bent my hasty steps, to meet
 The Grecian chief, who hither comes prepared
 To vent his keen reproaches.

AGA. I am told, 1160
 That thou, ev'n thou, the son of a vile slave,
 Hast dared to utter foulest calumny
 Against thy prince, and pass'd unpunish'd for it.

Mean as thy birth is, what had been thy pride
 And high demeanour, had thy mother sprung 1165
 From noble blood ? Barbarian as thou art,
 How couldst thou praise a wretch, who, like thyself,
 Was nothing ? We, it seems (for thou hast sworn it),
 Are not the masters or of Greece or thee :

Ajax, alone, thou say'st was leader here. 1170

Shall we be thus insulted by our slaves ?
 Who is this boaster ? and what mighty deed
 Hath he perform'd which I could not have done ?

Is there no hero in the Grecian host
 But Ajax ? Vain, indeed, were our resolves 1175

In the warm contest for Achilles' arms,
 If Teucer yet shall question the decree
 Against the general voice ; resisting still,
 And still reproachful, with delusive arts,
 Though conquer'd, yet opposing : wholesome laws
 Will naught avail, if those whom justice deems 1181
 Superior to the vanquish'd must resign,
 And first in virtue be the last in fame.

It must not be : not always the huge size
 Of weighty limbs ensures the victory ; 1185

They who excel in wisdom are alone
 Invincible. Thou seest the brawny ox,
 How the small whip will drive him through the
 field :

What if the medicine be applied to thee,
 For thy proud, boasting, and licentious tongue ? 1190

'Twill be thy portion soon, unless thou learn'st
 More wisdom. Henceforth, mindful what thou art,
 Bring with thee one of nobler blood to plead
 Thy cause ; for know, the language which thou
 talk'st

Is barbarous, and I understand thee not. 1195

CHO. I can but wish that wisdom may attend
 To guide you both.

TEU. Alas, how very soon
 Are all the merits of the dead forgotten !
 O Ajax ! is the memory of thee

Already lost ! ev'n by the man for whom 1200

Thy life so oft was ventur'd in the field !

But now 'tis past, and buried in oblivion.

Thou wordy slanderer ! canst thou not remember,

When, baffled and unequal to the foe,

Close pent within the walls our forces lay ;— 1205

Canst thou not call to mind, who came alone

To your deliverance, when devouring flames

Tower'd o'er our ships ; when Hector leap'd the
foss,

And rush'd among us ! Then who fought for Greece ?

Who drove him back, but Ajax ! who, thou say'st,

Could never fight ; did he not fight for you ? 1211

He met the noble Hector hand to hand ;

Unbidden dared the fortune of the field ;

He scorn'd the coward's art to fix his lot

In the moist earth ; forth from the crested helmet

It sprang the first : such were the deeds of Ajax, 1216

And I was witness of them ; I, the slave,

For so thou call'st me, sprung from a barbarian.

How dares a wretch like thee to talk of birth ?

Who was thy grandsire ? Canst thou not remember

That old barbarian, Phrygian Pelops ? Tell me, 1221

Who was thy father ? Atreus, was he not ?

That worst of men, who, at a brother's table,

Served up his children ; horrible repast !

Thy mother, too, a Cretan, and a slave ; 1225

A vile adulteress, whom thy father caught,

And headlong cast into the sea. Shalt thou

Talk then to me of birth ? to me, the son

Of valiant Telamon, renown'd in war,

And wedded to a queen, the royal race 1230

Of great Laomedon, and fairest gift

Of famed Alcides ! Thus of noble blood

From either parent sprung, shall I disgrace

The man whom thou, inhuman ! wouldst still keep

Unburied here ? Dost thou not blush to think on't ?

But, mark me well ; if thou dost cast him forth, 1236

Not he alone inglorious on the plain

Shall lie ; together we will perish all :
 To die with glory in a brother's cause
 Is better far than fighting for the wife 1240
 Of Agamemnon or of Menelaus :
 For thy own sake, and not for mine, remember,
 If thou provoke me, thou'lt be sorry for it,
 And wish thou'dst rather feared than anger'd Teucer.

ULYSSES, AGAMEMNON, MENELAUS, TEUCER, CHORUS.

CHO. Ulysses, if thou mean'st not to inflame, 1245
 But to compose this dreadful strife, thou comest
 In happiest hour.

ULYS. Far off I heard the voice
 Of the Atridæ o'er this wretched corse.

Whence rose the clamour, friends ?

MEN. With bitterest words
 This Teucer, here, Ulysses, has reviled me. 1250

ULYS. What words ? for if he heard the same
 from thee,
 I blame him not.

AGA. He did provoke me to it.

ULYS. What injury hath he done thee ?

AGA. He declares
 The body shall have sepulture ; himself
 Perforce will bury Ajax, spite of me 1255
 And of my power.

ULYS. Shall I be free, and speak
 The truth to thee, without reproach or blame ?

AGA. Thou mayst ; for well thou know'st I hold
 Ulysses,
 Of all the Greeks, my best and dearest friend.

ULYS. Then hear me : by the gods, I must entreat
 thee, 1260

Do not, remorseless and inhuman, cast
 The body forth unburied, nor permit
 Authority to trample thus on justice.
 E'er since our contest for Achilles' arms,
 Hath Ajax been my foe, and yet I scorn 1265
 To use him basely : ev'n Ulysses owns,

Of all the Grecian chiefs who came to Troy
 Except Achilles, Ajax was the bravest.
 Do not deny him then the honours due
 To worth so great ; for know, it were a crime, 1270
 Not against him alone, but 'gainst the gods ;
 A violation of the laws divine.

To hurt the brave and virtuous after death,
 Ev'n though he liv'd thy foe, is infamous.

AGA. Plead'st thou for Ajax ?

ULYS. Yes : I was his foe 1275
 While justice would permit me ; but he's dead :
 Therefore thou shouldst not triumph, nor rejoice
 With mirth unseemly o'er a vanquish'd man.

AGA. 'Tis not so easy for a king to act
 By honour's strictest rules.

ULYS. 'Tis always so, 1280
 To hearken to the counsels of a friend,
 When he advises well.

AGA. But know, the good
 And virtuous still submit to those who rule.

ULYS. No more : when thou art vanquished by
 thy friends,
 Thou art thyself the conqueror.

AGA. Still remember 1285
 For whom thou plead'st, Ulysses.

ULYS. For a foe,
 But for a brave one.

AGA. Dost thou thus revere,
 Ev'n after death, thy enemy ?

ULYS. I do :
 Virtue is dearer to me than revenge. 1289

AGA. Such men are most unstable in their ways.

ULYS. Our dearest friend may one day be our foe.

AGA. Dost thou desire such friends ?

ULYS. I cannot love
 Or praise the unfeeling heart.

AGA. This day shall Greece
 Mark us for cowards.

ULYS. Greece will call us just.

AGA. Wouldst thou persuade me, then, to grant
him burial ? 1295

ULYS. I would, and for that purpose came I hither.

AGA. How every man consults his own advantage,
And acts but for himself !

ULYS. And who is he
Whom I should wish to serve before Ulysses ?

AGA. 'Tis thy own work, remember, and not mine.

ULYS. The deed will win thee praise, and every
tongue 1301
Shall call thee good.

AGA. Thou know'st I'd not refuse
Ulysses more, much more than this ; but Ajax,
Or buried or unburied, is the same,
And must be hateful still to Agamémnon : 1305
But do as it beseems thee best.

CHO. Ulysses !
The man who says thou art not wise and good,
Is senseless and unjust.

ULYS. I tell thee, Teucer,
Henceforth I am as much the friend of Ajax
As once I was his foe : ev'n now I mean 1310
To join with thee, a fellow-labourer
In all the pious offices of love ;
Nor would omit, what ev'ry man should pay,
The honours due to such exalted virtue.

TEU. O best of men ! thou hast my thanks and
praise, 1315
And well deservest them, for thou hast transcended
My utmost hopes. I little thought the worst
Of all his foes among the Grecian host
Would thus alone defend, alone protect
The dead from insult, when these thund'ring leaders
United came, to cast his body forth 1321
With infamy : but may the god who rules
O'er high Olympus, and the vengeful Furies
Daughters of Jove, the guilt-rewarding sisters,
With all-deciding justice, soon repay 1325
The haughty tyrants : for thy offer'd aid

Son of Laertes, in the funeral rites,—
 Perhaps it may offend the honour'd shade
 Of our dead friend ; it cannot be accepted.
 For all beside we thank thee : if thou will'st 1330
 To send assistance from the Grecian camp,
 'Twill be received ; the rest shall be my care.
 Thou hast perform'd the duty of a friend,
 And we acknowledge it.

ULYS. I would have lent
 My willing aid ; but since it must not be, 1335
 I shall submit : farewell. [*Exit Ulysses.*]

AGAMEMNON, MENELAUS, TEUCER, EURYSACES, CHORUS.

TEU. Thus far is right :
 The time already past doth chide our sloth.
 My friends, be vigilant : let some prepare
 The hollow foss ; some o'er the sacred flame
 Place the rich tripod for the funeral bath : 1340
 Forth from the camp a chosen band must bear
 His glittering arms, and trophies of the war.
 Do thou, my child, if thou hast strength, uplift
 [*to Eurysaces.*]

Thy father's body : see, the veins, yet warm,
 Spout forth with blood. Haste, help, assist me, all
 Who bear the name of friends, and pay with me
 Your last sad duties to the noble Ajax ; 1347
 For never was on earth a better man.

CHO. Whate'er of good or ill weak mortals know,
 Must from their best of guides, experience, flow.
 Seek then no farther : for to man is given 1351
 The present state ; the future left to Heaven.

ELECTRA.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

ELECTRA, daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra.

ORESTES, brother of Electra.

PYLADES, friend of Orestes. • •

GOVERNOR of Orestes.

CLYTEMNESTRA, wife of Ægisthus.

CHRYSOthemis, sister of Electra.

ÆGISTHUS, king of Argos and Mycenæ.

CHORUS, composed of the principal ladies of Mycenæ.

ELECTRA.

ARGUMENT.

AFTER Agamemnon had been assassinated by his wife Clytemnestra and her paramour Ægisthus, Orestes, then an infant, was preserved from a participation in the same fate by his sister Electra, who privately conveyed him to the court of Strophius, king of Phocis, who treated him with the utmost kindness, and educated him with his son Pylades, with whom he contracted an indissoluble friendship. On attaining years of maturity, Orestes, together with his companion, visited the city of Mycenæ in disguise, and, by the assistance of his governor, deluded the adulterous pair into a fatal security, by a report which he propagated of his death. Having at length discovered himself to Electra, who willingly co-operated with him in the prosecution of his revenge, he slew his mother during the absence of the tyrant, who, on his return, received the just punishment of his atrocious guilt.

ACT I.

Scene,—Mycenæ, before the palace of Ægisthus.

ORESTES, PYLADES, GOVERNOR OF ORESTES.

Gov. O son of great Atrides, he who led
imbattled Greece to Troy's devoted walls;
at length behold what thy desiring eyes
so long have sought; behold thy native soil,
thy much-loved Argos, and the hallow'd grove 5
of Io, frantic maid: on this side lies

6 Io, the daughter of Inachus, who was transformed into a
sheep by Jupiter, to conceal her from the rage of Juno, who dis-
covered and placed her under the guardianship of Argus.

The Lycian forum ; on the left, the fane
 Of Juno far renown'd : behold ! we come
 To rich Mycenæ, and the slaughterous house
 Of Pelop's hapless race, from whose sad walls 10
 Long since I bore thee, at thy sister's hand
 Gladly received, and with paternal care
 To this bless'd day have foster'd up thy youth,
 Till riper years should give thee to return,
 And pay with dire revenge thy father's murder. 15
 Now, my Orestes ! and thou dear companion
 Of all our sufferings, much-loved Pylades !
 Let deepest counsel sway our just resolves ;
 For, lo ! resplendent Phœbus, with his light,
 Calls up the cheerful birds to early song, 20
 And gloomy Night hath lost her starry train :
 Come then, my friends, and ere the awaken'd city
 Pours forth her busy throngs, this instant here
 Let us consult : believe me, 'tis no time
 For dull delay ; 'tis the decisive hour, 25
 And this the very crisis of our fate.

ORES. What proofs thou givest me of the noblest
 nature
 And true benevolence, thou good old man !
 Of servants sure the faithfulest and best
 That ever bore the name. The generous steed, 30
 Though worn with years, thus keeps his wonted
 courage,
 And warns his master of approaching danger :
 Like him, thou stirr'st me up to noble deeds,
 And follow'st me undaunted : but attend
 To what I have resolved ; and, if I err, 35
 Let thy superior judgment set me right.
 When to the Delphic oracle I flew,
 Eager to know how on my father's foes
 I best might satiate my revenge, the god
 Enjoin'd me not by force, or open arms, 40
 To rush upon them ; but with guileful arts,

And silent, well-conducted fraud, betray them.
 Such was his will ; thou, therefore, soon as time
 Shall lend the opportunity, unknown
 And unsuspected (as thy absence hence 45
 For so long space, and hoary age, shall make thee),
 Must steal upon them, learn their secret counsels,
 As soon thou mayst, and quick inform us of them ;
 Say thou'rt of Phocis, from Phanoteus sent,
 By one who is their friend and firm ally : 50
 Say, and confirm it with a solemn oath,
 Orestes is no more, by a rude shock
 Thrown from his chariot at the Pythian games ;
 Be this thy tale. Meantime (for thus the god
 His will divine express'd) my father's tomb 55
 With due libations and devoted hair
 Ourselves will crown ; and thence returning, bring,
 From the dark covert where thou know'st 'twas hid,
 The brazen urn ; there, we shall tell the tyrant,
 Thrice welcome news ! Orestes' ashes lie. 60
 What should deter me from the pious fraud,
 Since my feign'd death but gains me real fame,
 And I shall wake to better life ! the deed
 Which brings success and honour must be good.
 Ofttimes the wisest and the best of men, 65
 From death like this, have rose with added greatness ;
 Ev'n so thy friend to his deluded foes
 Shall soon return unlook'd-for, and before them
 Shine like a star with more distinguish'd lustre.
 O my loved country, and its guardian gods ! 70
 Receive Orestes, and with happy omen
 Propitious smile ; and thou, paternal seat !
 For, lo ! by Heaven's command I come to purge
 thee
 Of vile usurpers, and avenge thy wrong.

49 Phanoteus was a small town of Phocis, a city of Greece, famous for the oracle of Delphos : according to Strabo, it was formerly called *Panope*.

Drive me not from thee an abandon'd exile 75
 With infamy, but grant me to possess
 My father's throne, and fix his injured race.
 Thus far 'tis well: my faithful minister!
 Thou to thy office, we to ours with speed;
 So time and opportunity require, 80
 On whom the fate of mortals must depend.

ELEC. [*from within.*] O misery!

Gov. Methought a mournful voice
 Spake from within.

OES. Perhaps the poor Electra:
 Shall we not stay and hearken to it?

Gov. No:
 First, be Apollo's great behests obey'd 85
 Before thy father's tomb; that pious deed
 Perform'd shall fire our souls with nobler warmth,
 And crown our bold attempt with fair success.

[*Excunt.*]

ELECTRA.

O sacred light! and, O, thou ambient air!
 Oft have ye heard Electra's loud laments, 90
 Her sighs, and groans, and witness'd to her woes,
 Which ever, as each hateful morn appear'd,
 I pour'd before you; what at eve retired
 I felt of anguish, my sad couch alone
 Can tell, which, water'd nightly with my tears, 95
 Received me sorrowing: that best can tell
 What pangs I suffer'd for a hapless father,
 Whom not the god of war with ruthless hand
 Struck nobly fighting in a distant soil;
 But my fell mother, and the cursed Ægisthus, 100
 The partner of her bed, remorseless slew.
 Untimely didst thou fall, lamented shade!
 And none but poor Electra mourns thy fate;
 Nor shall she cease to mourn thee, while these eyes
 View the fair heavens, or behold the sun; 105
 Never, O! never like the nightingale,

106 Philomela, the daughter of Pandion, and sister of Procne,

Whose plaintive song bewails her ravish'd brood;
 Here will I still lament my father's wrongs,
 And teach the echo to repeat my moan.
 O ye infernal deities! and thou, 110
 Terrestrial Hermes! and thou, Nemesis,
 Replete with curses! and ye vengeful Furies!
 Offspring of gods, the ministers of wrath
 To vile adulterers, who with pity view
 The slaughter'd innocent, behold this deed. 115
 O! come, assist, revenge my father's murder;
 Quickly, O! quickly bring me my Orestes;
 For, lo! I sink beneath oppressive wo,
 And can no longer bear the weight alone.

CHORUS, ELECTRA.

CHO. O wretched daughter of an impious mother!
 Wilt thou for ever mourn; for ever thus, 121
 With unavailing tears and endless sorrow,
 Lament the royal Agamemnon's fate,
 By a vile woman's wicked arts betray'd?
 Perish the hand (forgive the pious curse, 125
 Ye heavenly powers!) that gave the deadly blow!

ELEC. My noble friends, and partners in affliction,
 Who thus, to sooth my sorrows, kindly try
 Each art which love and friendship can inspire;
 Ye come to comfort me, I know ye do: 130
 I know my tears are fruitless all, and vain;
 But, O! permit me to indulge my griefs,
 For I must weep.

CHO. Thy tears can ne'er recall him
 From the dark mansions of the common grave,
 No, nor thy prayers; they can but make thee 135
 wretched,

the wife of Tereus. The poet, both in this and the following scene, takes the nightingale for Procne; as it was Procne, and not Philomela, who served up her son Itys to Tereus, in revenge for the injury done to her sister. Æschylus, Euripides, and Aristophanes also, suppose Procne to have been changed into a nightingale.

And sink thee deeper in calamity ;
Why art thou then so fond of misery ?

ELC. Devoid of sense and feeling is the heart
That can forget an injured parent's wrongs.
I love the airy messenger of Jove ; 140
The mournful bird that weeps her Itys' fate,
And every night repeats the tender tale ;
Thee too I reverence as a goddess, thee,
Unhappy Niobe ! for still thou weep'st,
And from the marble tears eternal flow. 145

CHO. But, O ! reflect that not to thee alone
Misfortune comes, that comes to all : behold
Iphianassa and Chrysothemis,
And him who hides his grief, illustrious youth,
The loved Orestes ; these have suffer'd too. 150

ELC. Orestes ! yes, Mycenæ shall receive
In happy hour her great avenger ; Jove
With smiles auspicious shall conduct him to me.
For him alone I wait ; for him, a wretch
Despised, of children and of nuptial rites 155
Hopeless I wander ; he remembers not
What I have done for him, what suffer'd ; still
With airy promises he mocks my hopes,
And yet he comes not to me.

CHO. But he will.
Despair not, daughter ; Jove is yet in heaven, 160
The god who sees, and knows, and governs all :
Patient to him submit, nor let thy rage
Too far transport thee, nor oblivion drown
The just remembrance of thy matchless woes.
Time is a kind, indulgent deity, 165
And he shall give thee succour, he shall send

140 Procne, called the messenger of Jove, from ushering in the spring. See the note on Philomela.

144 Niobe, the daughter of Tantalus, and queen of Thebes ; feigned by the poets to be turned into stone, after the death of her children.

148 The sisters of Electra.

The god of Acheron, from Chrysa's shores
To bring Orestes, and avenge thy wrongs.

ELEC. O! but the while how much of life is gone!
And I, a hopeless wretched orphan still, 170
Without a friend to guard or to protect me;
Disgraced, dishonour'd, like a stranger clad
In base attire, and fed with homeliest fare!

CHO. Sad news indeed the hapless messenger
To Argos brought, that spoke the wish'd return 175
Of thy loved father to his native soil;
Fatal the night when Agamemnon fell
Or by a mortal or immortal hand;
The work of fraud and lust, a horrid deed!
Whoe'er perform'd it.

ELEC. O detested feast! 180
O day the bitterest sure that ever rose!
With him I perished then; but may the gods
Repay the murderers; never may they hear
The voice of joy, or taste of comfort more.

CHO. Cease thy complaints: already hast thou
suffer'd 185

For thy loud discontents and threaten'd vengeance.
'Tis folly to contend with power superior.

ELEC. Folly, indeed, and madness! but my griefs
Will force their way; and while Electra breathes
She must lament; for who will bring me comfort, 190
Or sooth my sorrows? Let me, let me go,
And weep for ever.

CHO. 'Tis my love entreats;
Trust me, I feel a mother's fondness for thee,
And fain would save thee from redoubled woes.

ELEC. And wouldst thou have me then neglect the
dead? 195

167 Chrysa was a town of Phocis, of which Strophius, the father of Pylades, was king. This was the place where Orestes was privately educated, and accounts for the celebrated friendship of the two princes.

193 The Chorus is composed of the principal matrons of rank and quality in Mycenæ.

Forget my father ? Can there be such guilt !
 When I do so, may infamy pursue me ;
 And if I wed, may all the joys of love
 Be far removed ! If vengeance doth not fall
 On crimes like these, for ever farewell, justice ! 200
 Shame, honour, truth, and piety, farewell !

CHO. Pardon me, daughter ! if my warmth offend,
 Glad I submit ; we'll follow and obey thee.

ELEC. I am myself to blame, and blush to think
 How much unfit I seem to bear the weight 205
 Imposed upon me ; but indeed 'tis great.
 Forgive me, friends ! a woman born as I am,—
 Must she not grieve to see each added minute
 Fraught with new miseries ? thus to be a slave
 Ev'n in my father's house, and from those hands 210
 Which shed his blood to ask the means of life ?
 Think what my soul must suffer to behold
 The cursed Ægisthus seated on the throne
 Of Agamemnon, in the very robes
 Which once were his ! to see the tyrant pour 215
 Libations forth ev'n on the fatal spot
 Where the sad deed was done ! but, worst of all,
 To see the murderer usurp his bed,
 Embrace my mother (by that honour'd name
 If I may call a guilty wretch like her), 220
 Who, pleased, returns his love, and of her crimes
 Unconscious, smiles, nor fears the avenging Furies ;
 But ever, as the bloody day returns
 Which gave the royal victim to her wiles,
 Annual the dance and choral song proclaim 225
 A solemn feast ; nor impious sacrifice
 Forgets she then to her protecting gods.
 Shock'd at the cruel banquet, I retire,
 And in some corner hide my griefs, denied
 Ev'n the sad comfort to indulge my sorrows ; 230
 For Clytemnestra, in opprobrious terms,
 Reviles me oft :—"To thee alone," she cries,
 "Is Agamemnon lost, detested maid ?
 Think'st thou Electra only weeps his fate ?
 Perdition on thee ! May the infernal gods 235

Refuse thee succour, and protract thy pains !”
 Thus rails she bitter ; and if by chance she hear
 Orestes is approaching, stung with rage,
 Wild she exclaims,—“ Thou art the accursed cause :
 This is thy deed, who stole Orestes from me, 240
 And hid him from my rage ; but be assured,
 Ere long my vengeance shall o’ertake thee for it !”
 These threats her noble lord still urges on ;
 That vile adulterer, that abandon’d coward,
 Whose fearful soul call’d in a woman’s aid 245
 To execute his bloody purposes.

Meantime Electra sighs for her Orestes,
 Her wish’d avenger ; his unkind delay
 Destroys my hopes. Alas ! my gentle friends,
 Who can bear this, and keep an equal mind ? 250
 To suffer ills like mine, and not to err
 From wild distraction, would be strange indeed !

CHO. But say, Electra, is the tyrant near,
 Or may we speak our thoughts unblamed ?

ELEC. Thou mayst ;
 I had not else beyond the palace dared 255
 To wander hither.

CHO. I would fain have asked thee—

ELEC. Ask what thou wilt, Ægisthus is far off.

CHO. Touching thy brother, then ; inform me quick
 If aught thou know’st that merits firm belief.

ELEC. He promises, but comes not.

CHO. Things of moment
 Require deliberation and delay. 261

ELEC. O ! But did I delay to save Orestes ?

CHO. He boasts a noble nature, and will ne’er
 Forget his friends : be confident.

ELEC. I am ;
 Were I not so, I had not lived till now. 265

CHO. But soft ; behold the fair Chrysothemis
 Advance this way, and in her hand she bears
 Sepulchral offerings to the shades below.

266 The sepulchral offerings here mentioned were generally
honey, wine, milk, water, and barley-flour ; these were designed

CHRYSOthemis, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

CHRY. Still, my Electra, pouring forth thy griefs !
 Art thou not yet by sad experience taught 270
 How little they avail ? I too must feel,
 And could resent, as, were thy sister's power
 But equal to her will, her foes should know.
 Meantime with lower'd sail to bear the storm
 Befit us best, nor, helpless as we are, 275
 With idle hopes to meditate revenge.
 Yield then with me ; and though impartial justice
 Plead on thy side, remember if we prize
 Or life or liberty we must obey.

ELC. It ill becomes great Agamemnon's daughter
 Thus to forget her noble father's worth, 281
 And take a base unworthy mother's part ;
 For well I see from whom thy counsels flow ;
 Naught from thyself thou say'st, but all from her ;
 Either thy reason's lost, or if thou hast it, 285
 Thou hast forgot thy friends, who should be dear
 And precious to thee : of thy boasted hate
 Against our foes, and what thou vaunt'st to do,
 If thou hadst power, I reckon not : while with me
 Thou wilt not join in great revenge, but still 290
 Dissuadest me from it. Is't not cowardly
 To leave me thus ? Tell me, I beg thee tell me,
 What mighty gain awaits my tame submission,
 Should I suppress my griefs : I can but live ;
 That I do now, a wretched life indeed ! 295
 But 'tis enough for me, and I am happy,
 While I can torture them, and to the dead
 Pay grateful honours, if to them such care
 Aught grateful can bestow. Thy hate, I fear me,
 Is but in word ; thou dost befriend the murderers.
 For me, not all the wealth they could bestow, 301
 Not all the gifts which they have poured on thee,

to render the ghost propitious, and were poured on the ground
or grave-stone, and, together with a certain form of words, offered
to the deceased.

Should bind me to them : take thy costly banquets,
And let thy days with ease and pleasure flow :
Give me but food, and I am satisfied. 305

I wish not for thy honours ; nor wouldst thou,
If thou wert wise, receive them at their hands.
Thou mightst be daughter to the best of fathers,
And art thy mother's only ; take that name ;
And henceforth all shall mark thee as a wretch, 310
Who hath betray'd her father and her friends.

CHO. I do entreat you, let not anger come
Between you thus ; you both have reasoned well,
And much of mutual benefit may flow,
If each to other lend a patient ear. 315

CHRY. Custom, my noble friends ! hath made re-
proach
Familiar with me ; and so well I know
Her haughty mind, I had been silent still,
But that I saw the danger imminent,
And came to warn her of the fatal stroke, 320
Which soon must end her and her griefs together.

ELEC. Tell me this mighty danger ; if aught more
It threaten than Electra long hath borne,
I yield me to thy counsels.

CHRY. Hear me then :
Know thou art doomed, unless thou dost refrain 325
Thy clamorous griefs, far from the light of day,
And this thy native soil, within a cell
Dismal and dark to spend the poor remains
Of thy sad life, and there lament thy fate.

ELEC. Is it decreed ? Must it in truth be so ? 330

CHRY. Soon as Ægisthus shall return, it must.

ELEC. Quick let him come : I long to see him
here.

CHRY. Alas ! what dreadful imprecations these !

ELEC. Would he were present, if for this he
comes !

CHRY. What ! to destroy thee ? is thy mind dis-
turbed ? 335

ELEC. *That I might fly for ever from thy sight.*

CHRY. Wilt thou not think how to preserve thy life?

ELEC. Mine is a blessed life indeed to think of!

CHRY. It might be blessed if thou wouldst have it so.

ELEC. Teach me not basely to betray my friends.

CHRY. I do not; all I ask thee is to yield 341
To powers superior.

ELEC. Fawn on them thyself;
Thou dost not know Electra.

CHRY. Sure, it better
Deserves the name of wisdom to avoid
Than hasten thy destruction.

ELEC. No; to die 345
Were pleasure, could I but avenge my father.

CHRY. Our father, doubt it not, will pardon thee.

ELEC. 'Tis mean to think so.

CHRY. Wilt thou not consent?

ELEC. Never, O! never, be my soul so weak.

CHRY. Then to my errand; fare thee well.

ELEC. To whom, 350
Chrysothemis? and whither dost thou bear
Those sacred offerings!

CHRY. To our father's tomb,
From Clytemnestra.

ELEC. To the man she hated?
The man, my sister—

CHRY. Whom she kill'd, I know,
Thou wouldst say.

ELEC. Why, what should move her to it? 355

CHRY. If I mistake not, horrors late impress'd,
From a sad vision.

ELEC. O my country's gods!
Succour me now!

CHRY. What hopes dost thou conceive
From this?

ELEC. The dream: and I will tell thee all.

CHRY. I know but little of it.

ELEC. Tell me that: 360

Ofttimes to words, how few soe'er they be,
Is given the power to save or to destroy.

CHRY. Once more to light return'd (so fame reports),

Before her our loved father did appear,
The royal sceptre wielded in his hand, 365
Which now Ægisthus bears; whence seem'd to spring

A green and leafy branch, whose wide extent
O'er all Mycenæ spread its verdant shade :
This did I learn, and this alone, from one
Who listen'd long attentive, while she told 370
Her vision to the Sun; hence all her fears,
And hence my destined journey.

ELEC.

By the gods

Let me conjure thee, hear me; if thou dost not,
Too late shalt thou repent, when for thy guilt
Evil o'ertake thee. O Chrysothemis! 375
Never, I beg thee, to our father's tomb
Bear thou those offerings; 'twere a horrid deed,
From such a woman: give them to the winds,
Let them be hid, deep buried in the sands,
And not the smallest grain escape, to reach 380
That hallow'd place; let them remain for her,
Safe in the earth till she shall meet them there.
None but this shameless, this abandon'd woman,
Would e'er with impious offerings thus adorn
The tomb of him she murder'd: by the dead 385
Think'st thou such gifts can be with joy received?
Gifts from that hand, which from his mangled corse
Sever'd his lifeless limbs, and on the head
Of the poor victim wiped her bloody sword.
Madness, to think that offerings and ablutions 390

371 It was customary among the ancients, when they had been terrified by bad dreams, to open their windows in the morning, and relate their dreams to the Sun, who, they imagined, as he had power to dispel the darkness, could also turn aside all the evils which the preceding night had threatened them with.

Could purge such crimes, or wash her stains away!
Never, O! never: but of this no more.

Instant, my sister! thy devoted hair,
With these dishevell'd locks, and this my zone,
Plain as it is, and unadorn'd, shalt thou 395

Bear to our father: wretched offerings these,

But, O! 'tis all Electra now can give.

Bear them, and suppliant on thy knees implore him
To smile propitious, and assist his children.

Pray for Orestes, too, that soon with power 400

He may return, and trample on our foes;

So shall a fairer tribute one day grace

His honour'd tomb than now we can bestow.

Trust me, my sister! we are still his care,—

I know we are; from him the vision came, 405

The horrid dream, that shook her guilty soul.

Now, then, I beg thee, be a friend to me;

Be to thyself a friend, a friend to him,

Of all mankind the dearest, our dead father.

CHO. Well doth the pious virgin speak, and thou
Must yield to her requests.

CHRY. And so I will. 411

Where reason dictates, strife should never come:

But, quick, despatch, fulfil her just commands:

Yet, O my friend! remember, our attempt

Is full of danger, and let naught escape 415

That may betray me to my cruel mother;

For, if it reach her ear, this daring act,

I fear me much, shall one day cost us dear.

[Exit Chrysothemus.]

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

Or my prophetic mind is now no more

Attentive as of old to wisdom's lore, 420

Or Justice comes, with speedy vengeance fraught:

Behold! the goddess arm'd with power appears;

It must be so by Clytemnestra's fears,

And the dire dream that on her fancy wrought.

Thy father, not unmindful of his fate, 425
 Shall hither come, his wrongs to vindicate ;
 And, in his gore imbrued,
 The fatal axe with him shall rise,
 Shall ask another sacrifice,
 And drink with him the cruel tyrant's blood. 430

ANTISTROPHE.

Lo ! with unnumber'd hands, and countless feet,
 The Fury comes, her destined prey to meet :
 Deep in the covert hid, she glides unseen,
 Hangs o'er the trembling murderer's head,
 Or steals to the adulterous bed, 435
 An awful witness of the guilty scene.
 Doubtless, the dream, with all its terrors, meant,
 For crimes like these, some dreadful punishment,
 If mortals aught from mighty visions know ;
 If truth from great Apollo's shrine 440
 Appear in oracles divine,
 Presaging bliss to come, or threatening future wo.

EPODE.

O Pelops ! to thy country and to thee
 The fatal course brought wo and misery ;
 For since the time when from his chariot thrown, 445
 For thee the guilty wreath to gain,
 The hapless Myrtilus was slain,
 Naught has thy wretched race but grief and sorrow
 known.

446 Œnomaus had a beautiful daughter, named Hippodamia, whom he refused to give in marriage, because the oracle declared that a son-in-law would be fatal to him ; he promised, however, to bestow his daughter on any man who should conquer him in the chariot-race, on condition that all who were vanquished by him should be put to death : many bold adventurers accepted the terms, and perished in the attempt : the horses of Œnomaus were swift as the wind, and consequently invincible. These examples, however, did not deter Pelops, who entered the lists against Œnomaus, and bribed his charioteer, Myrtilus, with a promise of half his kingdom if he succeeded. Myrtilus listened to his offers, and purposely forgot to put the pins into the wheels

SOPH.—G

Of fairest form, with towering antlers graced,
 Pursued, and slew her: of the Deity 510
 Something, with pride elate, he utter'd then
 Disdainful: quick resenting the affront,
 Latona's daughter stay'd the Grecian fleet,
 Nor would forgive, till for her slaughter'd beast
 The offending father sacrificed his child. 515
 Thus Iphigenia fell; and but for her,
 Greece ne'er had seen, or Ilion's lofty towers,
 Or her own native soil: the father strove
 In vain to save; and not for Menelaus
 He gave her up at last, but for his country. 520
 Suppose a brother's fondness had prevail'd,
 And she was given for him; would that excuse
 Thy horrid deed? what law required it of thee?
 That law alone by which thyself must fall;
 If blood for blood be due, thy doom is fix'd. 525
 Plead not so poorly then; but tell me why
 Thou livest adulterous thus with a vile ruffian,
 Thy base assistant? Why are those, who sprung
 From thy first nuptials, cast unkindly forth,
 For his new race? Was this thy piety? 530
 Was this too to revenge thy daughter's death?
 In pure revenge to wed her deadliest foe
 Was noble, was it not? but I forget,
 You are my mother, so it seems you say,
 And I must hold my peace; but I deny it: 535
 I say you are my mistress, not my mother;
 A cruel mistress that afflicts my soul,
 And makes this weary life a burden to me.
 Orestes too, the hapless fugitive,
 Who once escaped thy fatal hand, now drags 540
 A loathsome being: him, thou say'st, I look'd for
 To join in my revenge, and so I did:
 I would have been revenged, I tell thee so.
 Say, I am base, malicious, impudent,
 Abusive, what thou wilt; for if I am, 545
 It speaks my birth, and I resemble thee.

CHO. Resentment deep hath fired the virgin's breast:

Whether with truth and justice on her side
She speak, I know not.

CLY. Can they plead for her?

What care, what love, or tenderness is due 550
To an abandon'd child, who, shameless, thus
Reviles a parent? Is there, after this,
A crime in nature she would blush to act?

ELEC. I am not base, nor shameless, as thou call'st me;

For know, e'en now I blush for what is past, 555
Indecent warmth, and words that ill become
My tender years and virgin modesty:
But 'twas thy guilt, thy malice, urged me to it.
From bad examples bad alone we learn;
I only err'd because I follow'd thee. 560

CLY. Impudent wretch! and am I then the cause
Of all thy clamorous insolence?

ELEC. Thou art:

Foul is thy speech, because thy deed was foul;
For words from actions flow.

CLY. By chaste Diana,

Soon as Ægisthus comes, thy boldness meets 565
Its just reward.

ELEC. Is this thy promised leave,

So lately granted, freely to unfold
What now, incensed, thou dost refuse to hear?

CLY. Have I not heard thee; and, in base return,
With luckless omen dost thou now retard 570
My pious sacrifice?

ELEC. O! far from me

Be guilt like that; perform it, I beseech thee:
In holy silence shall these lips be closed,
And not a word escape to thwart thy purpose.

CLY. [*speaking to one of her attendants.*]

Hither do thou the sacred offerings bring, 575
Of various fruits composed, that to the god,
Whose altars we adorn, my fervent prayer

May rise accepted, and dispel my fears.
 Hear then, Apollo, great protector! hear 579
 My secret vows, for with no friendly ear [softly.]
 My voice is heard; her malice would betray,
 Should I unveil my heart, each word I utter'd,
 And scatter idle rumours through the crowd.
 Thus then accept my prayers, Lycean Phœbus!

[aloud.]

If in the doubtful visions of the night, 585
 Which broke my slumbers, aught presaging good
 Thou seest, propitious, O! confirm it all:
 But if of dire portent, and fraught with ill,
 To me and mine they came, avert the omen,
 And send the evil back upon my foes! 590
 O! if there are, whose fraudulent arts conspire
 To cast me forth from all my present bliss,
 Let them not prosper, but protect me still.
 Grant me to live and reign in quiet here,
 To spend each happy hour with those I love; 595
 With those my children who have ne'er offended
 By malice, pride, and bitterness of soul;
 Grant this, indulgent Phœbus! What remains
 Unask'd, thou seest; for naught escapes the eye
 Of gods; such knowledge have the sons of Jove. 600

GOVERNOR OF ORESTES, CLYTEMNESTRA, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

Gov. Is this the royal palace of Ægisthus?

Cho. Stranger, it is.

Gov. And this (for such her form
 And look majestic speak her) is his queen;
 Is it not so?

Cho. It is.

Gov. Great sovereign, hail!

596 Iphianassa and Chrysothemis, who had not affronted her, in opposition to Electra, who had.

598 Most probably the death of Orestes and Electra, which she did not dare to mention in the presence of her daughter. Clytemnestra's character is finely drawn; her very prayers we see are wicked, and agreeable to her actions.

With joyful news I come, and from a friend, 605
To thee, and to Ægisthus.

CLY. Stranger, welcome !
Say, first, from whom thy message ?

Gov. From Phanoteus ;
A Phocian sends thee things of utmost moment.

CLY. Of moment, say'st thou ? what ! impart
them quick !
Of friendly import, if from thence they come, 610
I know they must be.

Gov. Briefly, then, 'tis this ;
Orestes is no more.

ELEC. Undone Electra !
Now am I lost indeed.

CLY. What say'st thou ? speak !
Regard not her ; go on.

Gov. I say again,
Orestes is no more.

ELEC. Then what am I ? 615
I too am nothing.

CLY. [*to Electra.*] Get thee hence ! away !
Disturb us not. Most welcome messenger !
[*to the Governor.*]

Go on, I beg thee ; let me hear it all ;
Say how he died ; tell every circumstance.

Gov. For that I came, and I will tell thee all. 620
Know, then, Orestes, at the Pythian games,
Eager for glory, met assembled Greece.

Soon as the herald's far-resounding voice
Proclaim'd the course, the graceful youth appear'd,
And was by all admired : successful soon 625

He reach'd the goal, and bore his prize away.

Ne'er did these eyes behold such feats perform'd

By mortal strength ; in every course superior,

He rose victorious : theme of every tongue.

Was the brave Argive, great Atrides' son, 630

Who led the Grecian host ; but, O ! in vain

Doth human valour strive when power divine

Pursues vindictive : the succeeding morn

Uprose the sun, and with him all the train
Of youthful rivals in the chariot-race; 635
One from Achaia, one from Sparta came;
Of Afric's sons advanced a noble pair,
And join'd the throng: with these, Orestes drove
His swift Thessalian steeds; Ætolia next,
For yellow coursers famed; and next Magnesia; 640
And Athens, built by hands divine, sent forth
Her skilful charioteer; an Ænian next
Drove his white horses through the field; and last
A brave Bœotian closed the warrior train.
And now, in order ranged, as each by lot 645
Determined stood, forth at the trumpet's sound
They rush'd together, shook their glittering reins,
And lash'd their foaming coursers o'er the plain.
Loud was the din of rattling cars, involved
In dusty clouds; close on each other press'd 650
The rival youths, together stopp'd, and turn'd
Together all. The hapless Ænian first,
His fiery steeds, impatient of subjection,
Entangled on the Libyan chariot hung.
Confusion soon and terror through the crowd 655
Disastrous spread; the jarring axles rung;
Wheel within wheel now crack'd, till Chrysa's field
Was with the scatter'd ruins quite o'erspread.
The Athenian, cautious, view'd the distant danger,
Drew in the rein, and turn'd his car aside; 660
Then pass'd them all. Orestes, who, secure
Of conquest, lagg'd behind, with eager pace
Now urged his rapid course, and swift pursued.
Sharp was the contest; now the Athenian first,
And now Orestes o'er his coursers hung; 665
Now side by side they ran. When to the last
And fatal goal they came, Atrides' son,
As chance with slacken'd rein he turn'd the car,
Full on the pillar struck, tore from the wheel
Its brittle spokes, and from his seat down dropp'd
Precipitate: entangled in the reins, 671
His fiery coursers dragg'd him o'er the field,

While shrieking crowds with pity view'd the youth,
 Whose gallant deeds deserved a better fate.
 Scarce could they stop the rapid car, or loose 675
 His mangled corse, so drench'd in blood, so changed,
 That scarce a friend could say it was Orestes.
 Straight on the pile they burned his sad remains ;
 And, in an urn enclosed, a chosen few,
 From Phocis sent, have brought his ashes home, 680
 To reap due honours in his native land.
 Thus have I told thee all ; a dreadful tale !
 But, O ! how far more dreadful to behold it,
 And be, like me, a witness of the scene !

CHO. Ah me ! the royal race, the ancient house
 Of my beloved master is no more !

CLY. Great Jove ! 686
 The event was happy, but 'tis mix'd with wo.
 For, O ! 'tis bitter to reflect, that life
 And safety must be purchased by misfortunes.

Gov. Why grieve you, madam ?

CLY. 'Tis a bitter task 690
 To bring forth children : though a mother's wrong'd,
 A mother cannot hate the babe she bore.

Gov. Then with ungrateful news in vain I came.

CLY. O no ; most welcome is the man who brings
 Such joyful tidings, that a thankless child 695
 Is gone, who left a tender mother's arms,
 To live a voluntary exile from me ;
 Ne'er to these eyes return'd, but absent raged,
 And threaten'd vengeance for his murder'd father.
 Day had no rest for me, nor did the night 700
 Bring needful slumbers ; thoughts of instant death
 Appall'd me ever ; but my fears are gone ;
 He cannot hurt me now ; nor, worse than him,
 This vile, domestic plague, who haunts me still,
 To suck my vital blood ; but henceforth safe, 705
 Spite of her threats, shall Clytemnestra live.

ELEC. Now, my Orestes ! I indeed must mourn
 Thy cruel fate, imbitter'd by reproach,
 And from a mother's tongue. This is not well,

CLY. With him it is, and would it were with thee! 710

ELEC. Attend, O Nemesis! and hear the dead!

CLY. She heard that voice which best deserved her ear,

And her decrees are just.

ELEC. Go on, proud woman!
Insult us now, while Fortune smiles on thee.

CLY. Dost thou then hope that we shall fall hereafter? 715

ELEC. No, we are fallen ourselves, and cannot hurt thee.

CLY. Thrice worthy is that messenger of joy,
Whose gladsome news shall stop thy clamorous tongue.

Gov. My task perform'd, permit me to retire.

CLY. No, stranger! that were an affront to thee,
And to our friend who sent thee here. Go in, 721
And leave that noisy wretch to bellow forth
Her sorrows, and bewail her lost Orestes.

[*Exeunt Cly. and Gov.*]

ELEC. Mark'd ye, my friends? did ye observe her tears?

Did she lament him? did the mother weep 725

For her lost child? O no; she smiled, and left me.

Wretched Electra! O my dear Orestes!

Thou hast undone me; thou wert all my hope.

I thought thou wouldst have lived to aid my vengeance

For our loved father's death: deprived of both, 730

Whither shall I betake me? left at last

A slave to those whom most on earth I hate,

The cruel murderers! Must it then be so?

Never, Oh, never! Thus, bereft of all,

Here will I lay me down, and on this spot 735

End my sad days: if it offend the tyrants,

Let them destroy me; it will be kindly done.

Life is a pain; I would not wish to keep it.

CHO. Where is thy thunder, Jove ! or where thy
power,
O Phœbus ! if thou dost behold this deed, 740
And not avenge it ?

ELEC. O !

CHO. Why mourn'st thou thus ?

ELEC. Alas !

CHO. O ! do not groan thus.

ELEC. Thou destroy'st me.

CHO. How have I hurt thee ?

ELEC. Why thus vainly try
To give me comfort when I know he's dead ?
You but insult my woes.

CHO. Yet weep not thus : 745
Think on the golden bracelet that betray'd
Amphiaræus, who now—

ELEC. O me !

CHO. In bliss
Immortal reigns among the shades below.

ELEC. Alas !

CHO. No more ; a woman was the cause,
The accursed cause.

ELEC. She suffer'd, did she not ? 750

CHO. She did ; she perish'd.

ELEC. Yes ; I know it well :
He found a kind avenger of his wrongs ;
But I have none, for he is ravish'd from me.

CHO. Thou art indeed unhappy.

ELEC. 'Tis too true ;
I am most wretched ; it beats hard on me : 755
My sorrows never cease.

CHO. We see thy woes.

756 Amphiaræus was a famous soothsayer. During the time of the Theban war, he was solicited by Adrastus to assist Polynices, his son-in-law. Amphiaræus, foreseeing by his art that if he went he should be slain, hid himself, but was discovered by his wife Eriphyle, whom Polynices had bribed with a golden bracelet. Amphiaræus, being thus obliged to appear at the siege of Thebes, perished there. Alcmaeon, his son, revenged his father's death, and slew his mother Eriphyle.

ELEC. Therefore no more attempt to bring me
comfort :
There is no hope.
CHO. What say'st thou ?
ELEC. There is none ;
None left for me, my noble brother slain.
CHO. Death is the lot of human race.
ELEC. But, O ! 760
Not death like his : entangled in the reins,
His mangled body dragg'd along the field.
CHO. A strange, unthought-of chance !
ELEC. And then to fall
A wretched stranger in a foreign land !
CHO. O horrible !
ELEC. No sister there to close 765
His dying eyes, to grace him with a tomb,
Or pay the sad last tributary tear.

ACT III.

CHRYSOthemis, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

CHRY. Forgive me, sister, if my hasty steps
Press unexpected on thee : but I come
With joyful tidings, to relieve thy toils, 770
And make thee happy.
ELEC. What canst thou have found
To soften ills that will admit no cure ?
CHRY. Orestes is arrived : as sure as here
I stand before thee, the dear youth is come.
ELEC. Canst thou then make a mockery of my
woes, 775
Or dost thou rave ?
CHRY. No, by our father's gods,
I do not mean to scoff ; but he is come.
ELEC. Alas ! who told thee so ? What tongue
deceived
Thy credulous ear ?
CHRY. Know, from myself alone

I learn'd the truth, and confirmations strong 780
Oblige me to believe it.

ELBO. What firm proof
Canst thou produce? What hast thou seen or
known

To raise such flattering hopes ?

CHRY. O! by the gods
I beg thee but to hear me; then approve
Or blame impartial.

ELEC. If to tell thy tale 785
Can give thee pleasure, say it ; I attend.

CHRY. Know, then, that soon as to our father's tomb

Eager I came, my wondering eyes beheld
Down from its side a milky fountain flow,
As lately pour'd by some benignant hand. 790

With various flowers the sacred spot adorn'd,
Increased my doubts : on every side I look'd
And listen'd long, impatient for the tread
Of human footsteps there ; but all was peace.
Fearless approaching then the hallow'd spot, 795
I saw it spread with fresh devoted hair.

Instant my soul recall'd its dearest hope,
Nor doubted whence the pious offerings came.
I snatch'd them up, and silent gazed, while joy
Sprang in my heart, and filled my eyes with tears.

They were, they must be his ; ourselves alone 801
Excepted, who could bring them ? 'Twas not I,

And 'tis not given to thee to leave these walls
E'en for the gods : our mother scarce would do
So good an office ; or, e'en grant she might, 805

**We must have known it soon. Be confident,
It was Orestes then ; rejoice, Electra !**

**Sister, rejoice ; the same destructive power
Doth not for ever rule : behold at last**

A milder god, and happier days appear. 810

ELEC. Madness and folly ! how I pity thee !

CHRY. Have I not brought most joyful tidings to
thee?

SOPH.—H

ELEC. Alas! thou knowst not where nor what
thou art.

CHRY. Not know it! not believe what I have seen!

ELEC. I tell thee, wretched as thou art, he's
dead; 815

He and thy hoped-for bliss are gone together.
Thou must not think of it.

CHRY. A wretch indeed
I am, if this be so; but, O! from whom,
Where didst thou learn the fatal news?

ELEC. From one
Who was a witness of his death.

CHRY. Where is he? 820
Amazement chills my soul.

ELEC. He is within,
And no unwelcome guest to Clytemnestra.

CHRY. Alas! who then could bring these pious
gifts?

ELEC. Some friend to lost Orestes placed them
there.

CHRY. I flew with joy to tell thee better news, 825
And little thought to hear so sad a tale.

The griefs I came to cure are present still,
And a new weight of woes is come upon us.

ELEC. But know, my sister! all may yet be well,
If thou wilt hear me.

CHRY. Can I raise the dead? 830

ELEC. I am not mad, that I should ask it of thee.

CHRY. What wouldst thou have me do?

ELEC. I'd have thee act
As I shall dictate to thee.

CHRY. If aught good
It may produce, I do consent.

ELEC. Remember,
That if we hope to prosper, we must bear: 835
Success, in all that's human, must depend
On patience and on toil.

CHRY. I know it well,
And stand resolved to bear my part in all.

ELec. Hear then the solemn purport of my soul.
 Thou know'st too well how friendless and forlorn
 We both are left, by death bereaved of all 841
 Who could support us. While Orestes lived,
 I cherished flattering thoughts of sweet revenge ;
 But he is gone, and thou art now my hope.
 Yes, thou must join (for I will tell thee all) 845
 With thy Electra to destroy Ægisthus.
 To kill the murderer why should we delay ?
 Is aught of comfort left ? Thou canst but weep
 Thy ravish'd fortunes torn unjustly from thee ;
 Thou canst but mourn thy loss of nuptial rites, 850
 And each domestic bliss ; for, O my sister !
 The tyrant cannot be so weak of soul,
 As e'er to suffer our detested race
 To send new branches forth for his destruction.
 Assist me then ; so shalt thou best deserve 855
 A father's praises and a brother's love ;
 So shalt thou still, as thou wert born, be free,
 And gain a partner worthy of thy bed.
 Dost thou not hear the applauding voice of Fame,
 And every tongue conspire to praise the deed ? 860
 Will they not mark us as they pass along,
 And cry aloud, " Behold the noble pair !
 The pious sisters who preserved their race !
 Whose daring souls, unawed by danger, sought
 The tyrant's life, regardless of their own. 865
 What love to these, what reverence is due !
 These shall the assembled nation throng to praise,
 And every feast with public honours crown,
 The fit reward of more than female virtue !"
 Thus will they talk, my sister ! while we live, 870
 And after death our names shall be immortal.
 Aid then a brother's, aid a sister's cause,
 Think on thy father's wrongs, preserve Electra,
 Preserve thyself ; and oh ! remember well,
 That, to the noble mind, a life dishonour'd 875
 Is infamy and shame.

CHO. Be prudence now
The guide of both.

CHRY. Her mind was sure disturb'd,
My friends, or she would ne'er have talked so wildly.
Tell me, I beg thee, tell me, my Electra,
How couldst thou think so rash an enterprise 880
Could e'er succeed, or how request my aid ?
Hast thou consider'd what thou art ? a woman,
Weak and defenceless, to thy foes unequal.
Fortune, thou seest, each hour flows in upon them,
Nor deigns to look on us. What hand shall deal
The fatal blow, and pass unpunish'd for it ? 886
Take heed, my sister, lest, thy counsel heard,
A heavier fate than that we now lament
Fall on us both : what will our boasted fame
Avail us then ? It is not death alone 890
We have to fear ; to die is not the worst
Of human ills : it is to wish for death,
And be refused the boon. Consider well,
Ere we destroy ourselves and all our race.
Be patient, dear Electra ! for thy words, 895
As they had ne'er been utter'd, here they rest.
Learn to be wise at last, and when thou know'st
Resistance vain, submit to powers superior.

CHO. Submit, convinced that prudence is the first
Of human blessings.

ELEC. 'Tis as I expected ; 900
I knew full well thou wouldst reject my counsel :
But I can act alone ; nor shall this arm
Shrink at the blow, or leave its work unfinished.

CHRY. Would thou hadst shown this so much
vaunted prowess
When our loved father died !

ELEC. I was the same 905
By nature then, but of a weaker mind.

CHRY. Be sure thy courage fail thee not hereafter.

ELEC. Thy aid will ne'er increase it.

CHRY. 'Twill be wanted :

For those who act thus rashly must expect
The fate they merit.

ELEC. I admire thy prudence, 910
But I detest thy cowardice.

CHRY. I hear thee
With patience; for the time must one day come
When thou shalt praise me.

ELEC. Never.

CHRY. Be that left
For time to judge; enough remains.

ELEC. Away;
There's no dependence on thee.

CHRY. But there is, 915
Hadst thou a mind disposed for its acceptance.

ELEC. Go, tell thy mother all.

CHRY. I am not yet
So much thy enemy.

ELEC. And yet would lead me
To infamy.

CHRY. To safety and to wisdom.

ELEC. Must I then judge as thy superior reason
May dictate to me?

CHRY. When thy better mind 921
Shall come, I'll not refuse to follow thee.

ELEC. Pity, who talks so well should act so
poorly!

CHRY. That censure falls on thee.

ELEC. What I have said
Is truth.

CHRY. Truth, sister, may be dangerous. 925

ELEC. Rather than thus submit I will not live.

CHRY. Hereafter thou wilt praise me.

ELEC. I shall act
As seems most fit, nor wait for thy direction.

CHRY. Art thou resolved then? Wilt thou not
repent,
And take my counsel?

ELEC. Counsel such as thine 930
Is of all ills the worst.

CHRY. Because, Electra,
Thou dost not seem to understand it.

ELEC. Know, then,
That long ere this I had determined all.

CHRY. Then fare thee well ; thou canst not bear
my words,
Nor I thy actions.

ELEC. Go thy ways ; henceforth 935
I will not commune with thee ; nor thy prayers,
No, nor thy tears, should ever bend me to it :
Such idle commerce were the height of folly.

CHRY. If thou dost think this wisdom, think so
still ;
But when destruction comes, thou wilt approve 940
My better counsel, and be wise too late. [*Exeunt.*]

CHORUS.

STROPHE 1.

Man's ungrateful, wretched race
Shall the birds of heaven disgrace,
Whose ever-watchful, ever-pious young
Protect the feeble parent whence they sprung ! 945
But if the blast of angry Jove
Hath power to strike, or Justice reigns above,
Not long unpunish'd shall such crimes remain ;
When thou, O Fame ! the messenger of wo,
Shalt bear these tidings to the realms below,—
Tidings, to Grecia's chiefs, of sorrow and of pain.

ANTISTROPHE 1.

Bid the sad Atridæ mourn, 952
Their house by cruel faction torn ;
Tell them, no longer by affection join'd
The tender sisters bear a friendly mind. 955
The poor Electra, now alone,
Making her fruitless, solitary moan,
Like Philomela, weeps her father's fate ;
Fearless of death, and every human ill,
Resolved her steady vengeance to fulfil : 960
Was ever child so good, or piety so great ?

STROPHE II.

Still are the virtuous and the good
 By adverse fortune unsubdued,
 Nor e'er will stoop to infamy and shame :
 Thus Electra dauntless rose, 965
 The war to wage with virtue's foes,
 To gain the meed of never-ending fame.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Far, far above thy enemies,
 In power and splendour mayst thou rise,
 And future bliss compensate present wo ! 970
 For thou hast shown thy pious love,
 By all that's dear to Heaven above,
 Or sacred held by mortals here below. [*Exeunt.*]

ACT IV.

ORESTES, PYLADES, *with attendants*, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

ORES. Say, virgins, if, by right instruction led,
 This way I tend to—

CHO. Whither wouldst thou go ? 975

ORES. The palace of Ægisthus.

CHO. Stranger, well
 Wert thou directed ; thou art there already.

ORES. Who, then, among your train shall kindly
 speak

A friend's approach, who comes with joyful news
 Of highest import ?

CHO. Be that office hers, [*pointing to Electra.*] 980
 Whom, bound by nature's ties, it best befits.

ORES. Go, then, and say, from Phocis are arrived
 Who beg admittance to the king.

ELEC. Alas !

And comest thou, then, to prove the dreadful tale
 Already told ?

ORES. What you have heard I know not ; 985
 But of Orestes came I here to speak,
 By Strophius' command.

ELEC. What is it ? say.

O, how I dread thy message !

ORES. [*showing the urn.*] Here behold
His poor remains—

ELEC. O lost, undone Electra !
'Tis then too plain, and misery is complete. 990

ORES. If for Orestes thus thy sorrows flow,
Know that within this urn his ashes lie.

ELEC. Do they, indeed ? Then let me, by the
gods
I do entreat thee, let me snatch them from thee ;
Let me embrace them, let me weep my fate, 995
And mourn our hapless race.

ORES. Give her the urn,
Whoe'er she be ; for not with hostile mind
She craves the boon : perhaps some friend ; perhaps
By blood united.

ELEC. [*taking the urn.*] O, ye dear remains
Of my Orestes, the most loved of men ! 1000
How do I see thee now ! how much unlike
What my fond hopes presaged, when last we parted !
I sent thee forth with all the bloom of youth
Fresh on thy cheek ; and now, O dismal change !
I bear thee in these hands an empty shade. 1005
Would I had died ere I had sent thee hence,
Ere I had saved thee from the tyrant's hand !
Would thou hadst died thyself that dreadful day,
And join'd thy murder'd father in the tomb,
Rather than thus, a wretched exile fallen, 1010
Far from thy sister in a foreign land !

I was not there with pious hands to wash
Thy breathless corpse, or from the greedy flame
To gather up thy ashes. What have all
My pleasing toils, my fruitless cares availed, 1015
E'en from thy infant years ; that as a mother
I watched thee still, and as a mother loved ?
I would not trust thee to a servant's hand,
But was myself the guardian of thy youth,
Thy dear companion : all is gone with thee. 1020

Alas ! thy death, like the devouring storm,
 Hath borne down all : my father is no more,
 And thou art gone, and I am going too.
 Our foes rejoice ; our mother, mad with joy,
 Smiles at our miseries ; that unnatural mother,
 She whom thou oft hast promised to destroy ; 1026
 But cruel fate hath blasted all my hopes,
 And for my dear Orestes left me naught
 But this poor shadow. O ! the accursed place,
 Where I had sent thee ! O my hapless brother !
 Thou hast destroy'd Electra : take me, then, 1031
 O take me to thee ! let this urn enclose
 My ashes too, and dust to dust be join'd,
 That we may dwell together once again.
 In life united by one hapless fate, 1035
 I would not wish in death to be divided ;
 The dead are free from sorrows.

CHO.

Fair Electra !

Do not indulge thy griefs ; but, O ! remember,
 Sprung from a mortal like thyself, Orestes
 Was mortal too ; that we are mortal all. 1040

Ores. [*aside.*] What shall I say ? I can refrain no
 longer.

Elec. Why this emotion ?

Ores. [*looking at Electra.*] Can it be Electra ?
 That lovely form !

Elec. It is, indeed, that wretch.

Ores. O dreadful !

Elec. Stranger ! dost thou weep for me ?

Ores. By impious hands to perish thus !

Elec. For me 1045

Doubtless thou weep'st, for I am changed indeed.

Ores. Of nuptial rites, and each domestic joy
 To live deprived !

Elec. Why dost thou gaze upon me ?

Ores. Alas ! I did not know I was so wretched.

Elec. Why, what hath made thee so ?

Ores. I see thy woes. 1050

Elec. Not half of them.

ORES. Can there be worse than these !

ELEC. To live with murderers !

ORES. What murderers ? whom ?

ELEC. The murderers of my father : bound to serve them.

ORES. Who binds thee ?

ELEC. One who calls herself a mother :—
A name she little merits.

ORES. But say how ! 1055
Doth she withhold the means of life, or act
With brutal violence to thee ?

ELEC. Both, alas !
Are my hard lot ; she tries a thousand means
To make me wretched.

ORES. And will none assist,
Will none defend thee ?

ELEC. None. My only hope 1060
Lies buried there.

ORES. O, how I pity thee !

ELEC. 'Tis kindly done ; for none will pity me,
None but thyself. Art thou indeed a stranger,
Or doth some nearer tie unite our sorrows ?

ORES. I could unfold a tale ;—but, say, these
virgins ! 1065
May I depend on them ?

ELEC. They are our friends,
And faithful all.

ORES. Then lay the urn aside,
And I will tell thee.

ELEC. Do not take it from me ;
Do not, dear stranger !

ORES. But I must indeed.

ELEC. Do not, I beg thee.

ORES. Come, you'll not repent it. 1070

ELEC. O my poor brother ! if thy dear remains
Are wrested from me, I am most unhappy.

ORES. No more ; thou must not grieve for him.

ELEC. Not grieve
For my Orestes !

ORES. No; you should not weep.

ELEC. Am I unworthy of him then?

ORES. O, no! 1075

But do not grieve.

ELEC. Not when I bear the ashes
Of my dear brother?

ORES. But they are not there,¹
Unless by fiction, and a well-wrought tale
That hath deceived thee.

ELEC. Where then is his tomb?

ORES. The living need none.

ELEC. Ha! what say'st thou?

ORES. Truth. 1080

ELEC. Does he then live?

ORES. If I have life, he lives.

ELEC. And art thou he?

ORES. Look here, and be convinced;
This mark, 'tis from our father.

ELEC. O bless'd hour!

ORES. Blessed indeed!

ELEC. Art thou then here?

ORES. I am.

ELEC. Do I embrace thee?

ORES. Mayst thou do it long! 1085

ELEC. O my companions! O my dearest friends!
Do ye not see Orestes, once by art
And cruel fiction torn from life and me,
But now by better art to life restored?

CHO. Daughter! we do; and see, mid all our
woes, 1090
From every eye fast flow the tears of joy.

ELEC. O, ye are come, my friends! in happiest
hour:

E'en to behold, to find again the man
Whom your souls wished for, ye are come.

CHO. We are;

But, O! in silence hide thy joys, Electra! 1095

ELEC. Wherefore in silence?

CHO. Lest our foes within
Should hear thee.

ELEC. Never, by the virgin power
Of chaste Diana, will I hide my joys,
Or meanly stoop to fear an idle throng
Of helpless women.

ORES. Women have their power, 1100
And that thou know'st.

ELEC. Alas! and so I do;
For, O! thou hast call'd back the sad remembrance
Of that misfortune which admits no cure,
And ne'er can be forgot.

ORES. A fitter time
May come, when we must think of that.

ELEC. All times, 1105
All hours, are fit to talk of justice in,
And best the present, now when I am free.

ORES. Thou art so; be so still.

ELEC. What's to be done?

ORES. Talk not, when prudence should restrain
thy tongue.

ELEC. Who shall restrain it? Who shall bind
Electra 1110

To fearful silence, when Orestes comes?
When thus I see thee here, beyond my thoughts,
Beyond my hopes.

ORES. The gods have sent me to thee;
They bade me come.

ELEC. Indeed! more grateful still
Is thy return; if by the gods' command 1115
Thou camest, the gods will sure protect thee here.

ORES. I would not damp thy joys, and yet I fear
Lest they should carry thee too far.

ELEC. O, no!
But after so long absence, thus return'd
To thy afflicted sister; sure thou wouldst not—

ORES. Do what?

ELEC. Thou wouldst not grudge me
the dear pleasure 1121
Of looking on thee?

ORES. No; nor suffer any
To rob thee of it.

ELEC. Shall I then ?

ORES. No doubt.

ELEC. I hear that voice, my friends ! I never
thought

To hear again : ye know, when I received 1125

The dreadful news, I kept my grief within,

Silent and sad ; but now I have thee here,

Now I behold thee, now I fix my eyes

On that dear form which never was forgotten.

ORES. Spend not thy time in fruitless words, nor
tell me 1130

How Clytemnestra lives, nor how Ægisthus

Hath lavish'd all our wealth : the present hour

Demands our strict'st attention. Tell me, how,

Whether by fraud or open force, our foes

May best be vanquish'd : let no cheerful smile 1135

Betray thee to thy mother ; seem to grieve

As thou wert wont ; when we have done the deed,

Joy shall appear, and we will smile in safety.

ELEC. Thy will is mine. Not to myself I owe
My present bliss ; I have it all from thee, 1140

From thee, my brother ! nor should aught persuade
me

To give Orestes e'en a moment's pain :

That were ungrateful to the indulgent Power,

Who thus hath smiled propitious. Know, Ægisthus

Has left the palace ; Clytemnestra's there ; 1145

And for thy needless fears that I should smile,

Or wear a cheerful face, I never shall.

Hatred so strong is rooted in my soul,

The sight of them will make me sad enough.

The tears of joy perhaps may flow for thee, 1150

And add to the deceit ; for flow they must,

When I behold thee in one happy hour

Thus snatch'd from life, and thus to life restored.

I could not hope it : O, 'tis passing strange !

If from the tomb our father should arise, 1155

And say, he lived, I think I should believe him ;

And, O ! when thou art come so far, 'tis fit

SOPH.—I

I yield to thee in all: do thou direct
 My every step; but know, had I been left
 Alone, e'en I would not have fail'd in all, 1160
 But conquer'd bravely, or as bravely fell.

ORES. No more. I hear the footsteps as of one
 Coming this way.

ELEC. Strangers! go in, and bear
 That which with joy they cannot but receive,
 But which with joy they cannot long possess. 1165

GOVERNOR OF ORESTES, ELECTRA, ORESTES, CHORUS.

Gov. Madness and folly thus to linger here!
 Have ye no thought? is life not worth your care?
 Do ye not know the dangers that surround you?
 Had I not watch'd myself before the palace,
 Ere ye had entered, all your secret plan 1170
 Had been discovered to your foes within:
 Wherefore no more of this tumultuous joy,
 And lengthen'd converse; 'tis not fitting now.
 Go in; away; delays are dangerous
 At such an hour: our fate depends upon it. 1175

ORES. May I with safety? is all well within?

Gov. None can suspect you.

ORES. Spake you of my death,
 As we determined?

Gov. Living as thou art,
 They do account thee one among the dead.

ORES. And are they glad? what say they?

Gov. By-and-by 1180
 We'll talk of that; let it suffice, that all
 Is right within; and that which most they think so
 May prove most fatal to them.

ELEC. [*pointing to the Governor.*] Who is this?

ORES. Do you not know?

ELEC. I cannot recollect him.

ORES. Not know the man to whom you trusted
 me! 1185

Under whose care—

ELEC. When? how?

ORES. To Phocis sent,
I 'scaped the tyrant.

ELEC. Can it then be he,
Among the faithless only faithful found,
When our dear father fell ?

ORES. It is the same.

ELEC. [*to Gov.*] Dearest of men ! great guardian
of our race ! 1190

Art thou then here ? thou, who hast saved us both
From countless woes ? Swift were thy feet to
bring

Glad tidings to me, and thy hand stretch'd forth
Its welcome succour : but, O ! why deceive me ?
Why wouldst thou kill me with thy dreadful tale,
E'en when thou hadst such happiness in store ? 1196
Hail, father, hail ! for I must call thee so :
Know, thou hast been to me, in one short day,
Both the most hated and most loved of men.

Gov. No more of that : we shall have time enough
To talk of it hereafter. Let us go ; 1201
This is the hour ; the queen is now alone,
And not a man within : if ye delay,
Expect to meet more formidable foes,
In wisdom and in numbers far superior. 1205

ORES. We will not talk, my Pylades ! but act.
Let us go in ; but to the gods, who guard
This place, be first due adoration paid.

ELEC. Hear, then, Apollo ! great Lycæan ! hear
Their humble prayer. O ! hear Electra too, 1210
Who with unsparing hand her choicest gifts
Hath never fail'd to lay before thy altars.
Accept the little all which now remains
For me to give : accept my humblest prayers,
My vows, my adorations ; smile propitious 1215
On all our counsels. O ! assist us now,
And show mankind what punishment remains
For guilty mortals from offended Heaven ! [*Exeunt.*]

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

Behold, he comes! the slaughter-breathing god,
Mars, ever thirsting for the murderer's blood: 1220

And see, the dogs of war are close behind.
Naught can escape their all-devouring rage:
This did my conscious heart long since presage,
And the fair dream that struck my raptured mind.

ANTISTROPHE.

The avenger steals along, with silent feet, 1225
And sharpened sword, to his paternal seat,

His injured father's wrongs to vindicate:
Conceal'd from all by Maia's fraudulent son,
Who safe conducts him till the deed be done.

Nor longer will delay the needful work of fate. 1230
[*Exeunt.*]

ACT V.

ELECTRA, CHORUS.

ELEC. O my dear friends! they are about it now;
The deed is doing: but be still.

CHO. What deed?
How? where?

ELEC. She doth prepare the funeral banquet;
But they are not far from her.

CHO. Why then leave them?

ELEC. To watch Ægisthus, lest he steal upon us,
And blast our purpose.

1228 Mercury, the son of Jupiter and Maia, was the god of fraud and treachery. The propriety of Mercury's peculiar assistance in this place may likewise be accounted for from his relation to Myrtilus, who was slain by Pelops.

1233 The Greek funeral banquet, which was usually spread on the tomb of the deceased by the nearest relation. This banquet Electra imagines that Clytemnestra was already preparing for Orestes, whom she supposed dead: "but they," says she, "are not far from her;" that is, they who are preparing one for her. The sentence, we see, is purposely unfinished.

CLY. [*behind the scenes.*] O! I am betrayed! 123
My palace full of murderers! not a friend
Left to protect me!

ELEC. Some one cries within:
Did you not hear?

CHO. It is too horrible
For mortal ear: I tremble at the sound. 124

CLY. [*within.*] Ægisthus! O! where art thou?

ELEC. Hark! again

The voice, and louder.

CLY. [*within.*] O! my child, my child!
Pity thy mother! pity her who bore thee!

ELEC. Be thine the pity which thou show'dst to
him,

And to his father.

CHO. O! unhappy kingdom! 124
O, wretched race! thy misery is full:
This day will finish all.

CLY. [*within.*] O! I am wounded!

ELEC. Another stroke! Another, if thou canst.

CLY. [*within.*] Ah me! again?

ELEC. O, that Ægisthus too
Groan'd with thee now!

CHO. Then vengeance is complete: 125
The dead arise, and shed their murderous blood
In copious streams.

ORESTES, PYLADES, GOVERNOR OF ORESTES, ELECTRA,
CHORUS.

ELEC. Behold them here: their hands
Dropping with gore;—a pious sacrifice
To the great god of war. How is't, Orestes?

ORES. 'Tis very well, all's well: if there be truth
In great Apollo's oracles, she's dead. 126
Thou need'st not fear a cruel mother now.

CHO. No more; Ægisthus comes.

ELEC. Instant go in
Do you not see him? joyful he returns.

CHO. Retire; thus far is right: go on, and prosper. 1260

ORES. Fear not, we'll do it.

CHO. But immediately.

ORES. I'm gone. [*Exeunt Orestes, Pylades, and Gov.*]

ELEC. For what remains here to be done,
Be it my care; I'll whisper in his ear
A few soft flattering words, that he may rush
Unknowing, down precipitate, on ruin. 1265

ÆGISTHUS, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

ÆGIS. Which of you knows aught of these Phocian guests,
Who come to tell us of Orestes' death?
You first I ask, Electra! once so proud
And fierce of soul. It doth concern you most:
And therefore you, I think, can best inform me. 1270

ELEC. Yes, I can tell thee: is it possible
I should not know it!—what were not to know
A circumstance of dearest import to me?

ÆGIS. Where are they, then?

ELEC. Within.

ÆGIS. And spake they truth?

ELEC. They did; a truth not proved by words
alone, 1275
But facts undoubted.

ÆGIS. Shall we see him, then?

ELEC. Ay, and a dreadful sight it is to see.

ÆGIS. Thou art not wont to give me so much joy;
Now I am glad indeed.

ELEC. Glad mayst thou be,
If aught there is in that can give thee joy. 1280

ÆGIS. Silence within; and let my palace gates
Be open'd all, that Argos and Mycenæ
May send her millions forth to view the sight;
And if there are who nourish idle hopes
That still Orestes lives, behold him here, 1285
And learn submission, nor inflame the crowd

Against their lawful sovereign, lest they feel
An angry monarch's heaviest vengeance on them.

ELEC. Already I have learn'd the task, and yield
To power superior.

[*Scene opens, and discovers the body of Clytemnestra
extended on a bier and covered with a veil.*]

ORESTES, PYLADES, GOVERNOR OF ORESTES, ÆGISTHUS,
ELECTRA, CHORUS, and a crowd of spectators from
the city.

ÆGIS. What a sight is here ! 1290
O deity supreme ! this could not be
But by thy will ; and whether Nemesis
Shall still o'ertake me for my crime I know not.
Take off the veil, that I may view him well ;
He was by blood allied, and therefore claims 1295
Our decent sorrows.

ORES. Take it off thyself ;
'Tis not my office ; thee it best befits
To see and to lament.

ÆGIS. And so it does,
And I will do it : send Clytemnestra hither.
[*Taking off the veil.*]

ORES. She is before thee.

ÆGIS. Ha ! what do I see ! 1300

ORES. Why, what's the matter ? what affrights
thee so ?

Do you not see him ?

ÆGIS. In what dreadful snare
Am I then fallen ?

ORES. Dost thou not now behold
That thou art talking with the dead ?

ÆGIS. Alas !
Too well I see it, and thou art—Orestes. 1305

ORES. So great a prophet thou, and guess so ill ?

ÆGIS. I know that I am lost, undone for ever :
But let me speak to thee.

ELEC. Do not, Orestes !
No, not a word. What can a moment's space

Profit a wretch like him, to death devoted ! 1:
 Quick let him die, and cast his carcass forth
 To dogs and vultures ; they will best perform
 Fit obsequies for him ; by this alone
 We can be free and happy.

ORES. Get thee in ;
 This is no time for talk ; thy life, thy life. 1:

ÆGIS. But why go in ? If what thou mean'st
 do

Be just, what need of darkness to conceal it ?
 Why not destroy me here ?

ORES. It is not thine
 Now to command : hence to the fatal place
 Where our dear father fell, and perish there. 1:

ÆGIS. This palace then is doom'd to be
 witness

Of all the present, all the future woes
 Of Pelop's hapless race.

ORES. Of thine, at least,
 It shall be witness : that's my prophecy,
 And a most true one.

ÆGIS. 'Tis not from thy father. 1:

ORES. Thou talk'st, and time is lost. Away !

ÆGIS. I follo

ORES. Thou shalt go first.

ÆGIS. Think'st thou I mean to fl

ORES. No ; but I'd make thy end most bitter
 thee

In every circumstance, nor let thee choose
 The softest means. Were all like thee to perish
 Who violate the laws, 'twould lessen much 13
 The guilt of mortals, and reform mankind. [*Exeu*

CHORUS.

O race of Atreus ! after all thy woes,
 How art thou thus, by one adventurous deed,
 To freedom and to happiness restored ! 13

PHILOCTETES.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

ULYSSES, king of Ithaca.

NEOPTOLEMUS, son of Achilles.

PHILOCTETES, son of Pæan, and companion of Hercules.

A SPY.

HERCULES.

CHORUS, composed of the companions of Ulysses and Neoptolemus.

PHILOCTETES.

ARGUMENT.

PHILOCTETES, the son of Pæan, had been honoured with the friendship of Hercules, who at his death bequeathed to him his bow, together with the poisoned arrows dipped in the blood of the hydra. Philoctetes, after this, being in search of an altar dedicated to his deceased friend in the island of Chrysa, was there bit by a serpent: the wound festered, and an incurable ulcer ensued; notwithstanding which, he proceeded to the siege of Troy, where the wound growing desperate, his continual cries and groans so interrupted the motions of the war and disheartened the soldiers, that the Grecian chiefs thought it advisable to remove him from the army; and Ulysses was accordingly commissioned to carry him to Lemnos, an uninhabited island in the Ægean Sea, and there to leave him. In this miserable situation he remained for ten years; when the oracle informed the Greeks that Troy could never be conquered without the arrows of Hercules, then in the possession of Philoctetes. Ulysses and Neoptolemus were despatched with directions to bring him to the siege. The son of Achilles, at the suggestion of his crafty companion, introduced himself to the wounded hero with an artful enumeration of affronts, which he pretended to have received from the Greeks; and having thus insinuated himself into his confidence, he contrived to get possession of the bow and fatal arrows: and the artifice was nearly brought to a successful termination, when, struck with remorse, Neoptolemus revealed his whole design to Philoctetes; and, at his earnest entreaties, restored him his weapons, in spite of the remonstrances of Ulysses. The services thus rendered by Neoptolemus were insufficient, however, to persuade Philoctetes to accompany him to Troy; when Hercules descended from the skies, and presently overcame all his scruples by the promise of a complete cure of his wounds by the skill of Esculapius.

ACT I.

Scene, Lemnos, near a grotto, in a rock by the sea-side.

ULYSSES, NEOPTOLEMUS, ATTENDANT.

ULYS. At length, my noble friend ! thou bravest
son

Of a brave father, father of us all,
The great Achilles ! we have reach'd the shore
Of sea-girt Lemnos, desert and forlorn,
Where never tread of human step is seen, 5
Or voice of mortal heard, save his alone,
Poor Philoctetes, Pæan's wretched son,
Whom here I left (for such were my commands
From Grecia's chiefs), when, by his fatal wound
Oppress'd, his groans and execrations dreadful 10
Alarm'd our hosts, our sacred rights profaned,
And interrupted holy sacrifice.

But why should I repeat the tale ? The time
Admits not of delay ; we must not linger,
Lest he discover our arrival here, 15
And all our purposed fraud to draw him hence
Be ineffectual : lend me then thy aid.
Surveying round thee, canst thou see a rock
With double entrance ; to the sun's warm rays
In winter open, and in summer's heat 20
Giving free passage to the welcome breeze ?
A little to the left there is a fountain
Of living water, where, if yet he breathes,
He slakes his thirst : if aught thou seest of this,
Inform me ; so shall each to each impart 25
Counsel most fit, and serve our common cause.

NEO. [*leaving Ulysses a little behind him.*] If I mis-
take not, I behold a cave,
Ev'n such as thou describest.

ULYS. Dost thou ? which way.

NEO. Yonder it is ; but no path leading thither,
Or trace of human footstep.

ULYS. In his cell 30
'Tis chance but he hath laid him down to rest ;
Look, if he hath not.

NEO. [*advancing towards the cave.*] Not a creature there.

ULYS. Nor food, nor mark of household preparation ?

NEO. A rustic bed of scatter'd leaves.

ULYS. What more ?

NEO. A wooden bowl, the work of some rude hand, 35

With a few sticks for fuel.

ULYS. This is all
His little treasure here.

NEO. Unhappy man !
Some linen for his wounds.

ULYS. This must be, then, 40
His place of habitation : far from hence
He cannot roam ; distemper'd as he is,
It were impossible. He is but gone
A little way, for needful food, or herb
Of power, to 'suage, and mitigate his pain :
Wherefore despatch this servant to some place
Of observation, whence he may espy 45
His every motion, lest he rush upon us.
There's not a Grecian, whom his soul so much
Could wish to crush beneath him, as Ulysses.

[*Makes a signal to the attendant, who retires.*]

NEO. He's gone to guard each avenue ; and now,
If thou hast aught of moment to impart 50
Touching our purpose, say it ; I attend.

ULYS. Son of Achilles ! mark me well ; remember,
What we are doing not on strength alone,
Or courage, but on conduct will depend ;
Therefore if aught uncommon be proposed, 55
Strange to thy ears, or adverse to thy nature,
Reflect that 'tis thy duty to comply,
And act conjunctive with me.

NEO. Well ! what is it ?

SOPH.—K

ULYS. We must deceive this Philoctetes ; that
 Will be thy task. When he shall ask thee who 60
 And what thou art, Achilles' son, reply ;
 Thus far within the verge of truth, no more.
 Add, that resentment fired thee to forsake
 The Grecian fleet, and seek thy native soil,
 Unkindly used by those, who long with vows 65
 Had sought thy aid to humble haughty Troy ;
 And when thou camest, ungrateful as they were,
 The arms of great Achilles, thy just right,
 Gave to Ulysses : here thy bitter taunts
 And sharp invectives liberally bestow 70
 On me : say what thou wilt, I shall forgive,
 And Greece will not forgive thee if thou dost not ;
 For against Troy thy efforts are all in vain
 Without his arrows : safely thou mayst hold
 Friendship and converse with him, but I cannot. 75
 Thou wert not with us when the war began,
 Nor bound by solemn oath to join our host,
 As I was ; me he knows, and if he find
 That I am with thee, we are both undone.
 They must be ours, then, these all-conquering arms ;
 Remember that. I know, thy noble nature 81
 Abhors the thought of treachery or fraud ;
 But what a glorious prize is victory !
 Therefore be bold ; we will be just hereafter.
 Give to deceit and me a little portion 85
 Of one short day, and for thy future life
 Be call'd the holiest, worthiest, best of men.

NEO. What but to hear alarms my conscious soul,
 Son of Laertes ! I shall never practise ;
 I was not born to flatter or betray ; 90
 Nor I, nor he (the voice of fame reports)
 Who gave me birth. What open arms can do,
 Behold me prompt to act ; but ne'er to fraud
 Will I descend. Sure we can more than match
 In strength a foe thus lame and impotent ; 95
 I came to be a helpmate to thee, not
 A base betrayer ; and, O king ! believe me ;

Rather, much rather, would I fall by virtue,
Than rise by guilt to certain victory.

ULYS. O noble youth, and worthy of thy sire ! 100
When I like thee was young, like thee of strength
And courage boastful, little did I deem
Of human policy ; but long experience
Hath taught me, son ! 'tis not the powerful arm,
But soft, enchanting tongue, that governs all. 105

NEO. And thou wouldst have me tell an odious
falsehood ?

ULYS. He must be gain'd by fraud.

NEO. By fraud ? and why
Not by persuasion ?

ULYS. He'll not listen to it,
And force were vainer still.

NEO. What mighty power
Hath he to boast ?

ULYS. His arrows, wing'd with death 110
Inevitable.

NEO. Then it were not safe
Ev'n to approach him.

ULYS. No ; unless by fraud
He be secured.

NEO. And think'st thou 'tis not base
To tell a lie then ?

ULYS. Not if on that lie
Depends our safety.

NEO. Who shall dare to tell it 115
Without a blush ?

ULYS. We need not blush at aught
That may promote our interest and success.

NEO. But where's the interest that should bias
me ?

Come he or not to Troy, imports it aught
To Neoptolemus ?

ULYS. Troy cannot fall 120
Without his arrows.

NEO. Saidst thou not, that I
Was destined to destroy her ?

ULYS. Without him
Naught canst thou do, and they without thee nothing.

NEO. Then I must have them.

ULYS. When thou hast, remember,
A double prize awaits thee.

NEO. What, Ulysses? 125

ULYS. The glorious names of valiant and of wise.

NEO. Away; I'll do it. Thoughts of guilt or shame
No more appal me.

ULYS. Wilt thou do it, then?
Wilt thou remember what I told thee of?

NEO. Depend on't; I have promised; that's sufficient. 130

ULYS. Here, then, remain thou; I must not be
seen;

If thou stay long, I'll send a faithful spy,
Who, in a sailor's habit well disguised,
May pass unknown; of him, from time to time,
What may best suit our purpose thou shalt know. 135
I'll to the ship; farewell; and may the god
Who brought us here, the fraudulent Mercury,
And great Minerva, guardian of our country,
And ever kind to me, protect us still! [*Exit Ulysses.*]

CHO. Master! instruct us, strangers as we are, 140
What we may utter, what we must conceal.
Doubtless the man we seek will entertain
Suspicion of us; how are we to act?

To those alone belong the art to rule,
Who bear the sceptre from the hand of Jove: 145
To thee, of right, devolves the power supreme,
From thy great ancestors deliver'd down:
Speak, then, our royal lord, and we obey.

NEO. If you would penetrate yon deep recess,

140 The Chorus is composed of the soldiers and followers of Ulysses and Neoptolemus; we must not be surprised, therefore, to find them conspiring with their masters to deceive Philoctetes, and throughout the play aiding and assisting the designs of their commanders.

To see the cave where Philoctetes lies, 150
Go forward ; but remember to return
When the poor wanderer comes this way, prepared
To aid our purpose here, if need require.

CHO. O king ! we ever meant to fix our eyes
On thee, and wait attentive to thy will. 155
But, tell us, in what part is he conceal'd ?
'Tis fit we know the place, lest unobserved
He rush upon us. Which way doth it lie ?
Seest thou his footsteps leading from the cave,
Or hither bent ?

NEO. [*advancing towards the cave.*] Behold the
double door 160
Of his poor dwelling, and the flinty bed.

CHO. And whither is its wretched master gone !

NEO. Doubtless in search of food, and not far off,
For such his manner is ; accustomed here
(So Fame reports) to pierce with winged arrows
His savage prey for daily sustenance ; 166
His wound still painful, and no hope of cure.

CHO. Alas ! I pity him ; without a friend,
Without a fellow-sufferer, left alone,
Deprived of all the mutual joys that flow 170
From sweet society ; distemper'd too.
How can he bear it ! O unhappy race
Of mortal man ! doom'd to an endless round
Of sorrows, and immeasurable wo !
Second to none in fair nobility 175

Was Philoctetes, of illustrious race ;
Yet here he lies, from every human aid
Far off removed, in dreadful solitude,
And mingles with the wild and savage herd ;
With them in famine and in misery 180
Consumes his days, and weeps their common fate,
Unheeded, save when babbling Echo mourns,
In bitterest notes, responsive to his wo.

NEO. And yet I wonder not ; for if aright
I judge, from angry Heaven the sentence came, 185
And Chrysa was the cruel source of all :

Nor doth this sad disease inflict him 'still
 Incurable, without assenting gods ;
 For so they have decreed, lest Troy should fall
 Beneath his arrows, ere the appointed time 190
 Of its destruction come.

CHO. No more, my son !

NEO. What say'st thou ?

CHO. Sure I heard a dismal groan
 Of some afflicted wretch !

NEO. Which way ?

CHO. Ev'n now
 I hear it, and the sound as of some step
 Slow moving this way : he is not far from us ; 195
 His plaints are louder now. Prepare, my son !

NEO. For what ?

CHO. New troubles ; for, behold, he comes ;
 Not like the shepherd, with his rural pipe
 And cheerful song, but groaning heavily.
 Either his wounded foot against some thorn 200
 Hath struck, and pains him sorely ; or, perchance,
 He hath espied from far some ship attempting
 To enter this inhospitable port,
 And hence his cries to save it from destruction.

[*Exeunt.*]

ACT II.

PHILOCTETES, NEOPTOLEMUS, CHORUS.

PHI. Say, welcome strangers ! what disastrous
 fate 205

Led you to this inhospitable shore,
 Nor haven safe, nor habitation fit,
 Affording ever ! Of what clime, what race ?
 Who are ye ! Speak ; if I may trust that garb,
 Familiar once to me, ye are of Greece, 210
 My much-loved country : let me hear the sound
 Of your long-wished-for voices : do not look
 With horror on me ; but in kind compassion

Pity a wretch deserted and forlorn
In this sad place. O! if ye come as friends, 215
Speak, then, and answer; hold some converse with
me;

For this, at least, from man to man is due.

NEO. Know, stranger, first, what most thou
seem'st to wish;

We are of Greece.

PHI. O happiness to hear!
After so many years of dreadful silence, 220
How welcome was that sound! O! tell me, son!
What chance, what purpose, who conducted thee?
What brought thee hither, what propitious gale?
Who art thou? Tell me all; inform me quickly.

NEO. Native of Scyros! thither I return; 225
My name is Neoptolemus, the son
Of brave Achilles. I have told thee all.

PHI. Dear is thy country, and thy father dear
To me, thou darling of old Lycomedes! 230
But tell me, in what fleet, and whence thou comest?

NEO. From Troy.

PHI. From Troy! I think thou wert not with us
When first our fleet sail'd forth.

NEO. Wert thou then there?
Or know'st thou aught of that great enterprise?

PHI. Know you not, then, the man whom you behold! 234

NEO. How should I know whom I had never seen?

PHI. Have you ne'er heard of me, nor of my
name?

Hath my sad story never reach'd your ear?

NEO. Never.

PHI. Alas! how hateful to the gods,

225 Scyros was an island in the Ægean Sea, of which Lycomedes was king. Hither Achilles was brought in woman's apparel to avoid the Trojan war; and, falling in love with Deilamia, the king's daughter, had by her Pyrrhus, otherwise Neoptolemus. This explains what follows, where Philoctetes calls him "the darling of old Lycomedes."

How very poor a wretch must I be, then, 239
That Greece should never hear of woes like mine!
But they who sent me hither, they conceal'd them,
And smile triumphant, while my cruel wounds
Grow deeper still. O, sprung from great Achilles!
Behold before thee Pæan's wretched son,
With whom (a chance but thou hast heard) remain
The dreadful arrows of renown'd Alcides; 246
Ev'n the unhappy Philoctetes; him,
Whom the Atridæ, and the vile Ulysses,
Inhuman left, distemper'd as I was
By the envenom'd serpent's deep-felt wound. 250
Soon as they saw that, with long toil oppress'd,
Sleep had o'erta'en me on the hollow rock,
There did they leave me, when from Chrysa's shore
They bent their fatal course: a little food,
And these few rags, were all they would bestow. 255
Such one day be their fate! Alas! my son,
How dreadful, think'st thou, was that waking to me,
When from my sleep I rose, and saw them not!
How did I weep, and mourn my wretched state,
When not a ship remain'd of all the fleet 260
That brought me here! No kind companion left
To minister or needful food or balm
To my sad wounds! On every side I look'd,
And nothing saw but wo; of that, indeed,
Measure too full; for day succeeded day, 265
And still no comfort came. Myself alone
Could to myself the means of life afford
In this poor grotto; on my bow I lived:
The winged dove, which my sharp arrow slew,
With pain I brought into my little hut, 270
And feasted there; then from the broken ice
I slaked my thirst, or crept into the wood
For useful fuel: from the stricken flint
I drew the latent spark, that warms me still
And still revives: this, with my humble roof, 275
Preserve me, son! but, O! my wounds remain.
Thou seest an island desolate and waste;

No friendly port, nor hopes of gain to tempt,
 Nor host to welcome in the traveller :
 Few seek the wild, inhospitable shore. 280
 By adverse winds, sometimes the unwilling guests
 (As well thou mayst suppose) were hither driven ;
 But when they came, they only pitied me,
 Gave me a little food, or better garb
 To shield me from the cold ; in vain I pray'd 285
 That they would bear me to my native soil,
 For none would listen. Here, for ten long years,
 Have I remain'd, while misery and famine
 Keep fresh my wounds, and double my misfortune.
 This have the Atridæ and Ulysses done, 290
 And may the gods with equal woes repay them !

CHO. O son of Pæan ! well might those who came,
 And saw thee thus, in kind compassion, weep :
 I too must pity thee : I can no more.

NEO. I can bear witness to thee, for I know 295
 By sad experience what the Atridæ are,
 And what Ulysses.

PHI. Hast thou suffer'd, then ?
 And dost thou hate them too ?

NEO. O ! that these hands
 Could vindicate my wrongs ! Mycenæ, then,
 And Sparta should confess, that Scyros boasts 300
 Of sons as brave and valiant as their own.

PHI. O noble youth ! but wherefore camest thou
 hither ?

Whence this resentment ?

NEO. I will tell thee all,
 If I can bear to tell it : know, then, soon
 As great Achilles died—

PHI. —O ! stay, my son ! 305
 Is then Achilles dead ?

NEO. He is, and not

299, 300 Two cities of Peloponnesus. Neoptolemus here threatens Agamemnon and Menelaus ; the former of whom was King of Mycenæ, and the latter of Sparta.

By mortal hand, but by Apollo's shaft
Fell glorious.

PHI. O! most worthy of each other,
The slayer and the slain! Permit me, son, 309
To mourn his fate, ere I attend to thine. [*He weeps.*]

NEO. Alas! thou need'st not weep for others'
woes;

Thou hast enough already of thy own.

PHI. 'Tis very true; and therefore to thy tale.

NEO. Thus, then, it was. Soon as Achilles died,
Phœnix, the guardian of his tender years, 315

Instant sail'd forth, and sought me out at Scyros:

With him the wary chief, Ulysses, came.

They told me then (or true or false I know not),

My father dead, by me, and me alone,

Proud Troy must fall: I yielded to their prayers; 320

I hoped to see at least the dear remains

Of him, whom living I had long in vain

Wish'd to behold: safe at Sigeum's port

Soon we arrived; in crowds the numerous host

Throng'd to embrace me, call'd the gods to witness,

In me once more they saw their loved Achilles 326

To life restored; but, he, alas! was gone.

I shed the duteous tear, then sought my friends,

The Atridæ (friends I thought them) claim'd the arms

Of my dead father, and what else remain'd 330

His late possession; when (O cruel words!

And wretched I to hear them!) thus they answer'd.

"Son of Achilles! thou in vain demand'st

Those arms, already to Ulysses given;

The rest be thine." I wept; "And is it thus!" 335

Indignant I replied, "ye dare to give

My right away."—"Know, boy!" Ulysses cried,

"That right was mine, and therefore they bestow'd

The boon on me;—me, who preserved the arms,

And him who bore them too." With anger fired 340

340 Ulysses was reported to have taken away the dead body
of Achilles from the Trojans, and carried it off the field of battle
to the Grecian camp.

At this proud speech, I threaten'd all that rage
 Could dictate to me, if he not return'd them.
 Stung with my words, yet calm, he answer'd me :
 "Thou wert not with us ; thou wert in a place
 Where thou shouldst not have been : and since thou
 mean'st 345
 To brave us thus, know, thou shalt never bear
 Those arms with thee to Scyros ; 'tis resolved."
 Thus injured, thus deprived of all I held
 Most precious, by the worst of men, I left
 The hateful place, and seek my native soil ; 350
 Nor do I blame so much the proud Ulysses,
 As his base masters. Army, city, all
 Depend on those who rule : when men grow vile,
 The guilt is theirs who taught them to be wicked
 I've told thee all ; and him who hates the Atridæ, 355
 I hold a friend to me, and to the gods.

CHORUS.—STROPHE.

O Earth ! thou mother of great Jove,
 Embracing all with universal love !
 Author benign of every good,
 Through whom Pactolus rolls his golden flood ! 360
 To thee, whom in thy rapid car
 Fierce lions draw, I rose, and made my prayer ;
 To thee I made my sorrows known,
 When from Achilles' injured son
 The Atridæ gave the prize, that fatal day, 365
 When proud Ulysses bore his arms away.

PHI. I wonder not, my friend ! to see you here,
 And I believe the tale ; for well I know
 The men who wrong'd you, know the base Ulysses.
 Falsehood and fraud dwell on his lips, and naught 370
 That's just or good can be expected from him :

360 The Earth, under the various names of Cybele, Ops, Rhea, and Vesta, called the Mother of the Gods, was worshipped in Phrygia and Libya, where the river Pactolus is said to have enriched Cræsus with its sands. Cybele is represented by the poets as drawn by lions.

But strange it is to me, that, Ajax present,
He dare attempt it.

NEO. Ajax is no more ;
Had he been living, I had ne'er been spoil'd
Thus of my right.

PHI. Is he then dead ?

NEO. He is. 375

PHI. Alas ! the son of Tydeus, and that slave
Sold by his father Sisyphus ;—they live,
Unworthy as they are.

NEO. Alas ! they do,
And flourish still.

PHI. My old and worthy friend,
The Pylian sage,—how is he ? He could see 380
Their arts, and would have given them better coun-
sels.

NEO. Weigh'd down with grief, he lives ; but, most
unhappy,
Weeps his lost son, his dear Antilochus.

PHI. O double wo ! Whom I could most have
wish'd
To live and to be happy, those to perish ! 385
Ulysses to survive ! It should not be.

NEO. O, 'tis a subtle foe ! but deepest plans
May sometimes fail.

PHI. Where was Patroclus then,
Thy father's dearest friend ?

NEO. He too was dead.
In war, alas ! (so Fate ordains it ever,) 390
The coward 'scapes, the brave and virtuous fall.

PHI. It is too true ; and now thou talk'st of
cowards,

376 Diomed was the son of Tydeus.

377 It was reported that Anticlea was taken away by Laertes
after her marriage with Sisyphus, for which the first husband re-
ceived a sum of money : Ulysses, therefore, was often reproached
with being the son of Sisyphus.

380 Nestor, King of Pylos.

383 Antilochus was slain by Memnon in the Trojan war.

Where is that worthless wretch, of readiest tongue,
Subtle and voluble ?

NEO. Ulysses ?

PHI. No ;

Thersites ; ever talking, never heard. 395

NEO. I have not seen him, but I hear he lives.

PHI. I did not doubt it : evil never dies ;
The gods take care of that : if aught there be
Fraudful and vile, 'tis safe ; the good and just
Perish unpitied by them. Wherefore is it ? 400
When gods do ill, why should we worship them ?

NEO. Since thus it is ; since virtue is oppress'd,
And vice triumphant ; who deserve to live
Are doom'd to perish, and the guilty reign ;—
Henceforth, O son of Pæan ! far from Troy 405
And the Atridæ will I live remote.

I would not see the man I cannot love.
My barren Scyros shall afford me refuge,
And home-felt joys delight my future days.
So fare thee well, and may the indulgent gods 410
Heal thy sad wound, and grant thee every wish
Thy soul can form ! Once more, farewell. I go,
The first propitious gale.

PHI. What, now, my son ?

So soon ?

NEO. Immediately ; the time demands
We should be near, and ready to depart. 415

PHI. Now, by the memory of thy honour'd sire,
By thy loved mother, by whate'er remains
On earth most dear to thee, O ! hear me now,
Thy suppliant : do not, do not thus forsake me,
Alone, oppress'd, deserted, as thou seest, 420
In this sad place. I shall (I know I must) be
A burden to thee ; but, O ! bear it kindly,
For ever doth the noble mind abhor
The ungenerous deed, and loves humanity.
Disgrace attends thee if thou dost forsake me ; 425
If not, immortal Fame rewards thy goodness.
Thou *mayst* convey me safe to Cæta's shores

SOPH.—L

In one short day : I'll trouble you no longer.
 Hide me in any part where I may least
 Molest you. Hear me, by the guardian god 430
 Of the poor suppliant, all-protecting Jove,
 I beg ! Behold me at thy feet : infirm,
 And wretched as I am, I clasp thy knees.
 Leave me not here, then, where there is no mark
 Of human footstep ; take me to thy home, 435
 Or to Eubœa's port, to Cœta ; thence
 Short is the way to Trachin, or the banks
 Of Sperchius' gentle stream, to meet my father,
 If yet he lives ; for, O ! I begg'd him oft,
 By those who hither came, to fetch me hence. 440
 Or he is dead, or they, neglectful, bent
 Their hasty course to their own native soil.
 Be thou my better guide ; pity and save
 The poor and wretched. Think, my son ! how frail
 And full of danger is the state of man, 445
 Now prosperous, now adverse : who feels no ills,
 Should therefore fear them ; and when fortune smiles,
 Be doubly cautious, lest destruction come
 Remorseless on him, and he fall unpitied.

CHŌ. O, pity him, my lord ! for bitterest woes 450
 And trials most severe he hath recounted.
 Far be such sad distress from those I love !
 O ! if thou hatest the base Atridæ, now
 Revenge thee on them, serve their deadliest foe ;
 Bear the poor suppliant to his native soil ; 455
 So shalt thou bless thy friend, and 'scape the wrath
 Of the just gods, who still protect the wretched.

NEO. Your proffer'd kindness, friends ! may cost
 you dear !
 When you shall feel his dreadful malady
 Oppress you sore, you will repent it.

CHŌ. Never 460
 Shall that reproach be ours.

436 Eubœa was a large island in the Ægean sea, now called
Negropont. Cœta, a mountain in Thessaly, now called *Banina*.

NEO. In generous pity
Of the afflicted thus to be o'ercome
Were most disgraceful to me : he shall go.
May the kind gods speed our departure hence,
And guide our vessels to the wish'd-for shore ! 465

PHI. O happy hour ! O kindest, best of men !
And you, my dearest friends ! how shall I thank you ?
What shall I do to show my grateful heart ?
Let us be gone ; but, O ! permit me first
To take my last farewell of my poor hut, 470
Where I so long have lived. Perhaps you'll say,
I must have had a noble mind to bear it.
The very sight, to any eyes but mine,
Were horrible ; but sad necessity
At length prevail'd, and made it pleasing to me. 475

CHO. One from our ship, my lord ! and with him
comes
A stranger. Stop a moment, till we hear
Their business with us.

Enter a SPY, in the habit of a merchant, with another Grecian.

SPY. Son of great Achilles !
Know, chance alone hath brought me hither, driven
By adverse winds to where thy vessels lay 480
As home I sail'd from Troy ; there did I meet
This my companion, who inform'd me where
Thou mightst be found : hence to pursue my course,
And not to tell thee what concerns thee near,
Had been ungenerous ; thou perhaps meantime, 485
Of Greece and of her counsels naught suspecting ;—
Counsels against thee, not by threats alone,
Or words enforced, but now in execution.

NEO. Now by my virtue, stranger ! for thy news
I am much bound to thee, and will repay 490
Thy service. Tell me what the Greeks have done.

SPY. A fleet already sails to fetch thee back,
Conducted by old Phoenix, and the sons
Of valiant Theseus.

NEO. Come they then to force me !
Or am I to be won by their persuasion ? 495

SPY. I know not that ; you have what I could learn.

NEO. And did the Atridæ send them ?

SPY. Sent they are,
And will be with you soon.

NEO. But wherefore, then,
Came not Ulysses ? Did his courage fail ?

SPY. He, ere I left the camp, with Diomed 500
On some important embassy sail'd forth,
In search—

NEO. Of whom ?

SPY. There was a man—but stay,
Who is thy friend here ? Tell me, but speak softly.
[*whispering him.*]

NEO. The famous Philoctetes.

SPY. Ha ! begone then ;
Ask me no more ; away immediately. 505

PHI. What do these dark, mysterious whispers
mean ?

Concern they me, my son ?

NEO. I know not what
He means to say ; but I would have him speak
Boldly before us all, what'er it be.

SPY. Do not betray me to the Grecian host, 510
Nor make me speak what I would fain conceal :
I am but poor ; they have befriended me.

NEO. In me thou seest an enemy confess'd
To the Atridæ ; this is my best friend,
Because he hates them too : if thou art mine, 515
Hide nothing then.

SPY. Consider first.

NEO. I have.

SPY. The blame will be on you.

NEO. Why let it be ;
But speak, I charge thee.

SPY. Since I must, then ; know,

In solemn league combined, the bold Ulysses,
And gallant Diomed, have sworn, by force 520
Or by persuasion, to bring back thy friend :
The Grecians heard Laertes' son declare
His purpose : far more resolute he seem'd
Than Diomed, and surer of success.

N^o. But why the Atridæ, after so long a time, 525
Again should wish to see this wretched exile ;—
Whence this desire ? came it from the angry god
To punish thus their inhumanity ?

S^{PR}. I can inform you ; for perhaps from Greece
Of late you have not heard. There was a prophet,
Son of old Priam, Helenus by name ; 531
Him, in his midnight walks, the wily chief,
Ulysses, curse of every tongue, espied ;
Took him, and led him captive, to the Greeks
A welcome spoil. Much he foretold to all, 535
And added last, that Troy should never fall,
Till Philoctetes from this isle return'd.

Ulysses heard, and instant promise gave
To fetch him hence ; he hoped by gentle means
To gain him ; those successless, force at last 540
Could but compel him : he would go, he cried,
And if he fail'd, his head should pay the forfeit.
I've told thee all, and warn thee to be gone,
Thou and thy friend, if thou wouldst wish to save
him.

PHI. And does the traitor think he can persuade
me ? 545
As well might he persuade me to return
From death to life, as his base father did.

547 Sisyphus, imagined by many to be the father of Ulysses ;
concerning whom a superstitious report prevailed, that, having
on his death-bed desired his wife not to bury him, on his arrival
in the infernal regions, he complained to Pluto of her cruelty
in not performing the funeral obsequies, and was by him per-
mitted, on promise of immediate return, to revisit this world, in
order to punish her for the neglect ; but when he came to earth,
being unwilling to go back to Tartarus, he was compelled by
Mercury.

SPY. Of that I know not : I must to my ship.
Farewell ; and may the gods protect you both !
[Exit.]

PHI. Lead me, expose me to the Grecian host !
And could the insolent Ulysses hope 551

With his soft flatteries e'er to conquer me ?
No ; sooner would I listen to the voice
Of that fell serpent, whose envenom'd tongue
Hath lamed me thus. But what is there he dare not
Or say or do ? I know he will be here 556

Ev'n now, depend on't ; therefore, let's away ;
Quick let the sea divide us from Ulysses :
Let us be gone ; for well-timed expedition
(The task perform'd) brings safety and repose. 560

NEO. Soon as the wind permits us, we embark,
But now 'tis adverse.

PHI. Every wind is fair,
When we are flying from misfortune.

NEO. True ;
And 'tis against them too.

PHI. Alas ! no storms
Can drive back fraud and rapine from their prey. 565

NEO. I'm ready ; take what may be necessary,
And follow me.

PHI. I want not much. ;
NEO. Perhaps

My ship will furnish you.

PHI. There is a plant
Which to my wound gives some relief : I must
Have that.

NEO. Is there aught else ?

PHI. Alas ! my bow 570
I had forgot ; I must not lose that treasure.

[*Philoctetes steps towards his grotto, and
brings out his bow and arrows.*]

NEO. Are these the famous arrows, then ?

PHI. They are.

NEO. And may I be permitted to behold,
To touch, to pay my adoration to them ?

PHI. In these, my son ! in every thing that's mine,
Thou hast a right.

NEO. But if it be a crime, 576
I would not ; otherwise—

PHI. O ! thou art full
Of piety ; in thee it is no crime ;
In thee, my friend ! by whom alone I look
Once more with pleasure on the radiant sun ; 580
By whom I live ; who givest me to return
To my dear father, to my friends, my country.
Sunk as I was beneath my foes, once more
I rise to triumph o'er them, by thy aid.
Behold them, touch them, but return them to me,
And boast that virtue which on thee alone 586
Bestow'd such honour. virtue made them mine.
I can deny thee nothing : he, whose heart
Is grateful, can alone deserve the name
Of friend, to every treasure far superior. 590

NEO. Go in.

PHI. Come with me ; for my painful wound
Requires thy friendly hand to help me onward.

[*Exeunt.*]

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

Since proud Ixion (doom'd to feel
The tortures of the eternal wheel,
Bound by the hand of angry Jove) 595
Received the due rewards of impious love ;
Ne'er was distress so deep, nor wo so great,
As on the wretched Philoctetes wait ;
Who, ever with the just and good,
Guiltless of fraud and rapine stood. 600
And the fair paths of virtue still pursued.
Alone on this inhospitable shore,
Where waves for ever beat and tempests roar,
How could he e'er or hope or comfort know, 604
Or painful life support, beneath such weight of wo ?

ANTISTROPHE I.

Exposed to the inclement skies,
 Deserted and forlorn he lies ;
 No friend or fellow-mourner there,
 To soothe his sorrows, and divide his care ;
 Or seek the healing plant, of power to 'suage 610
 His aching wound, and mitigate its rage :
 But if, perchance, awhile released
 From torturing pain, he sinks to rest,
 Awaken'd soon, and by sharp hunger pressed,
 Compell'd to wander forth in search of food, 615
 He crawls in anguish to the neighbouring wood ;
 Ev'n as the tottering infant in despair,
 Who mourns an absent mother's kind, supporting
 care.

STROPHE II.

The teeming Earth, which mortals still supplies
 With every good, to him her seed denies ; 620
 A stranger to the joy that flows
 From the kind aid which man on man bestows :
 Nor food, alas ! to him was given,
 Save when his arrows pierced the birds of heaven ;
 Nor e'er did Bacchus' heart-expanding bowl, 625
 For ten long years relieve his cheerless soul :
 But glad was he his eager thirst to slake
 In the unwholesome pool, or ever-stagnant lake.

ANTISTROPHE II.

But now, behold the joyful captive freed :
 A fairer fate and brighter days succeed ; 630
 For he at last hath found a friend
 Of noblest race, to save and to defend ;
 To guide him with protecting hand,
 And safe restore him to his native land ;
 On Sperchius' flowery banks to join the throng
 Of Melian nymphs, and lead the choral song 636
 On Ceta's top, which saw Alcides rise,
 And from the flaming pile ascend his native skies.

635 Sperchius was a river in Thessaly.

636 Melos was an island near Candia, reckoned among the
Cyclades, and now called Milo.

ACT III.

NEOPTOLEMUS, PHILOCTETES, CHORUS.

NEO. COME, Philoctetes! why thus silent! Wherefore

This sudden terror on thee?

PHI. O!

NEO. Whence is it! 640

PHI. Nothing; my son! go on.

NEO. Is it thy wound

That pains thee thus?

PHI. No; I am better now:

O! gods!

NEO. Why dost thou call thus on the gods?

PHI. To smile propitious, and preserve us—O!

NEO. Thou art in misery. Tell me: wilt thou not? 645

What is it?

PHI. O, my son! I can no longer
Conceal it from thee. O! I die, I perish!
By the great gods let me implore thee, now,
This moment, if thou hast a sword, O! strike;
Cut off this painful limb, and end my being. 650

NEO. What can this mean, that unexpected thus
It should torment thee?

PHI. Know you not, my son?

NEO. What is the cause?

PHI. Can you not guess it?

NEO. No.

PHI. Nor I.

NEO. That's stranger still.

PHI. My son, my son!

NEO. This new attack is terrible indeed! 655

PHI. 'Tis inexpressible: have pity on me.

NEO. What shall I do?

PHI. Do not be terrified,
And leave me; its returns are regular,

And, like the traveller, when its appetite
Is satisfied, it will depart. O! O! 660

NEO. Thou art oppress'd with ills on every side.
Give me thy hand: come, wilt thou lean upon me?

PHI. No; but these arrows, take, preserve them
for me

A little while, till I grow better: sleep
Is coming on me, and my pains will cease. 665
Let me be quiet: if, meantime, our foes
Surprise thee, let nor force nor artifice
Deprive thee of the great, the precious trust
I have reposed in thee: that were ruin
To thee and to thy friend.

NEO. Be not afraid; 670
No hands but mine shall touch them: give them to
me.

PHI. Receive them, son! and let it be thy prayer
They bring not woes on thee, as they have done
To me, and to Alcides. [*Gives him the bow and
arrows.*]

NEO. May the gods 675
Forbid it ever! may they guide our course,
And speed our prosperous sails!

PHI. Alas! my son!
I fear thy vows are vain; behold, my blood
Flows from the wound: O, how it pains me! now
It comes, it hastens: do not, do not leave me;
O, that Ulysses felt this racking torture, 680
Ev'n to his inmost soul! Again it comes.
O Agamemnon! Menelaus! why
Should not you bear these pangs as I have done?
O Death! where art thou, Death! so often call'd,
Wilt thou not listen! wilt thou never come? 685
Take thou the Lemnian fire, my generous friend!
Do me the same kind office which I did

686 Alluding, most probably, to the generally received opinion
that the forges of Vulcan were in the island of Lemnos.

687 Philoctetes had attended his friend Hercules in his last
moments, and set fire to the funeral pile, when he expired on
the top of Mount Ceta.

For my Alcides ; these are thy reward.
He gave them to me ; thou alone deserv'st
The great inheritance. What says my friend ? 690
What says my dear preserver ? O ! where art thou ?

NEO. I mourn thy hapless fate.

PHI. Be of good cheer ;
Quick my disorder comes, and goes as soon.
I only beg thee not to leave me here.

NEO. Depend on't, I will stay.

PHI. Wilt thou, indeed ? 695

NEO. Trust me, I will.

PHI. I need not bind thee to it
By oath.

NEO. O no ; 'twere impious to forsake thee.

PHI. Give me thy hand, and pledge thy faith.

NEO. I do.

PHI. Thither, O ! thither lead.

[*Pointing up to heaven.*]

NEO. What say'st thou ? where ?

PHI. Above.

NEO. What, lost again ? why look'st thou thus 700
On that bright circle ?

PHI. Let me, let me go.

NEO. [*lays hold of him.*] Where wouldst thou go ?

PHI. Loose me.

NEO. I will not.

PHI. O !

You'll kill me if you do not.

NEO. [*lets him go.*] There, then ; now
Is thy mind better ?

PHI. O ! receive me, earth ;
Receive a dying man : here must I lie ; 705
For O ! my pain's so great, I cannot rise.

[*Philoctetes sinks down on the earth near the entrance of the cave.*]

NEOPTOLEMUS, CHORUS.

NEO. Sleep hath o'erta'en him : see, his head is laid
On the cold earth ; the balmy sweat thick drops

From every limb, and from the broken vein 709
Flows the warm blood ; let us indulge his slumbers.

INVOCATION TO SLEEP.

CHO. Sleep, thou patron of mankind !
Great Physician of the mind !
Who dost nor pain nor sorrow know ;
Sweetest balm of every wo ;
Mildest sovereign ! hear us now ; 715
Hear thy wretched suppliant's vow :
His eyes in gentle slumbers close,
And continue his repose.
Hear thy wretched suppliants vow :
Great physician ! hear us now. 720

And now, my son ! what best may suit thy purpose
Consider well, and how we are to act.
What more can we expect ? The time is come ;
For better far is opportunity
Seized at the lucky hour, than all the counsels 725
Which wisdom dictates, or which craft inspires.

NEO. He hears us not : but easy as it is
To gain the prize, it would avail us nothing
Were he not with us. Phœbus hath reserved
For him alone the crown of victory : 730
But thus to boast of what we could not do,
And break our word, were most disgraceful to us.

CHO. The gods will guide us, fear it not, my son !
But what thou say'st, speak soft, for well thou
know'st

The sick man's sleep is short : he may awake 735
And hear us ; therefore let us hide our purpose.
If then thou think'st as he does,—thou know'st
whom,

This is the hour : at such a time, my son !
The wisest err ; but mark me, the wind's fair,
And Philoctetes sleeps, void of all help. 740
Lame, impotent, unable to resist,
He is as one among the dead ; ev'n now

737 The Chorus here means Ulysses.

We'll take him with us ; 'twere an easy task.
Leave it to me, my son : there is no danger.

NEO. No more ; his eyes are open : see, he
moves. 745

PHILOCTETES, NEOPTOLEMUS, CHORUS.

PHL. [*Awaking.*] O fair returning light, beyond my
hopes !

You too, my kind preservers ! O my son !
I could not think you would have stay'd so long
In kind compassion to thy friend. Alas !
The Atridæ never would have acted thus : 750
But noble is thy nature, and thy birth ;
And therefore little did my wretchedness,
Nor from my wounds the noisome-stench deter
Thy generous heart. I have a little respite.
Help me, my son ! I'll try to rise ; this weakness 755
Will leave me soon, and then we'll go together.

NEO. I little thought to find thee thus restored.
Trust me, I joy to see thee free from pain,
And hear thee speak ; the marks of death were on
thee.

Raise thyself up ; thy friends, here, if thou wilt,
Shall carry thee, 'twill be no burden to them, 761
If we request it.

PHI. No ; thy hand alone.
I will not trouble them ; 'twill be enough
If they can bear with me and my distemper,
When we embark.

NEO. Well, be it so ; but rise. 765

[*Philoctetes rises.*]

PHI. O never fear ; I'll rise as well as ever.

[*Exeunt.*]

ACT IV.

NEOPTOLEMUS, PHILOCTETES, CHORUS.

NEO. How shall I act ?

PHI. What says my son ?

SOPH.—M

- NEO. Alas!
 I know not what to say ; my doubtful mind—
 PHI. Talk'd you of doubts ? You did not, surely !
 NEO. Ay,
 That's my misfortune.
 PHI. Is then my distress 770
 The cause at last you will not take me with you ?
 NEO. All is distress and misery, when we act
 Against our nature, and consent to ill.
 PHI. But, sure, to help a good man in misfortunes
 Is not against thy nature.
 NEO. Men will call me 775
 A villain ; that distracts me.
 PHI. Not for this,
 For what thou mean'st to do, thou mayest deserve it.
 NEO. What shall I do ? Direct me, Jove ! To
 hide
 What I should speak, and tell a base untruth,
 Were double guilt.
 PHI. He purposes at last, 780
 I fear it much, to leave me.
 NEO. Leave thee ! No.
 But how to make thee go with pleasure hence,
 There I'm distress'd.
 PHI. I understand thee not ;
 What means my son ?
 NEO. I can no longer hide
 The dreadful secret from thee : thou art going 785
 To Troy, ev'n to the Greeks, to the Atridæ.
 PHI. Alas ! what say'st thou ?
 NEO. Do not weep, but hear me.
 PHI. What must I hear ? What wilt thou do
 with me ?
 NEO. First, set thee free ; then carry thee, my
 friend,
 To conquer Troy.
 PHI. Is this indeed thy purpose ? 790
 NEO. This am I bound to do.
 PHI. Then am I lost,

me, betray'd. Canst thou, my friend! do this?
 Give me my arms again.

O. It cannot be:
 I must obey the powers who sent me hither:
 He enjoins: the common cause demands it. 795

I. Thou worst of men! thou vile artificer
 and most infamous! what hast thou done?
 Have I been deceived? Dost thou not blush
 To look on me, to behold me thus
 With thy feet imploring? Base betrayer! 800

Deprive me of my bow, the means of life,
 My only means; give them, restore them to me;
 Do not take all. Alas! he hears me not,
 Refrains to speak; but casts an angry look,
 And says, I never shall be free again. 805

Mountains, rivers, rocks, and savage herds!
 When I speak; to you alone I now
 Breathe my sorrows; you are wont to hear
 And complaints, and I will tell you all
 I have suffer'd from Achilles' son; 810
 Bound by solemn oath to bear me hence
 From my dear native soil, now sails for Troy.

A perjured wretch first gave his plighted hand,
 And stole the sacred arrows of my friend,
 Son of Jove, the great Alcides: those 815
 He means to show the Greeks, to snatch me hence,
 To boast his prize; as if poor Philoctetes,
 An empty shade, were worthy of his arm.

I have been what I was, he ne'er had thus
 Deprived me, and ev'n now to fraud alone 820
 He owes the conquest: I have been betray'd.
 Give me my arms again, and be thyself
 No more. O! speak: thou wilt not; then I'm
 Lost.

A poor hut! again I come to thee,
 And destitute of food: once more 825
 Give me, here to die; for now, no longer
 Can my swift arrow reach the flying prey,
 Nor the mountains pierce the wandering herd;

I shall myself afford a banquet now
 To those I used to feed on; they the hunters, 830
 And I their easy prey: so shall the blood,
 Which I so oft have shed, be paid by mine;
 And all this too from him whom once I deem'd
 Stranger to fraud, nor capable of ill.
 And yet I will not curse thee, till I know 835
 Whether thou still retain'st thy horrid purpose,
 Or dost repent thee of it; if thou dost not,
 Destruction wait thee!

CHO. We attend your pleasure,
 My royal lord! we must be gone; determine
 To leave, or take him with us.

NEO. His distress 840
 Doth move me much: trust me, I long have felt
 Compassion for him.

PHI. O! then by the gods
 Pity me now, my son! nor let mankind
 Reproach thee for a fraud so base.

NEO. Alas!
 What shall I do? Would I were still at Scyros!
 For I am most unhappy.

PHI. O my son! 846
 Thou art not base by nature, but misguided,
 By those who are, to deeds unworthy of thee:
 Turn then thy fraud on them who best deserve it,
 Restore my arms, and leave me.

NEO. Speak, my friends! 850
 What's to be done?

Enter ULYSSES.

ULYS. Ha! dost thou hesitate?
 Traitor! be gone! give me the arms.

PHI. Ah me!
 Ulysses here?

ULYS. Ay, 'tis Ulysses' self
 That stands before thee.

PHI. Then I'm lost—betray'd;
 This was the cruel spoiler.

ULYS. Doubt it not : 855

'Twas I ; I do confess it.

PHI. [*to Neoptolemus.*] O my son !
Give me them back.

ULYS. It must not be ; with them
Thyself must go, or we shall drag thee hence.

PHI. And will they force me ? O, thou daring
villain !

ULYS. They will, unless thou dost consent to go.

PHI. Wilt thou, O Lemnos ! wilt thou, mighty
Vulcan ! 861

With thy all-conq'ring fire, permit me thus
To be torn from thee !

ULYS. Know, great Jove himself
Doth here preside : he hath decreed thy fate ;
I but perform his will.

PHI. Detested wretch ! 865
Makest thou the gods a cover for thy crime ?
Do they teach falsehood !

ULYS. No ; they taught me truth ;
And therefore hence : that way thy journey lies.
[*Pointing to the sea.*]

PHI. It doth not.

ULYS. But I say it must be so.

PHI. And Philoctetes, then, was born a slave ! 870
I did not know it.

ULYS. No, I mean to place thee
Ev'n with the noblest, ev'n with those by whom
Proud Troy must perish.

PHI. Never will I go,
Befall what may, while this deep cave is open
To bury all my sorrows.

ULYS. What wouldst do ? 875

PHI. Here throw me down, dash out my desperate
brains
Against this rock, and sprinkle it with my blood.

ULYS. [*to the Chorus.*] Seize and prevent him.

[*They seize him.*]
PHI. Manacled ! O hands,

How helpless are you now ! Those arms which
 once 879

Protected, thus torn from you ! Thou abandoned,
 [to Ulysses.

Thou shameless wretch ! from whom nor truth nor
 justice,

Naught that becomes the generous mind, can flow,
 How hast thou us'd me ! how betray'd ! Suborn'd
 This stranger, this poor youth, who, worthier far
 To be my friend than thine, was only here 885

Thy instrument : he knew not what he did,
 And now, thou seest, repents him of the crime
 Which brought such guilt on him, such woes on me.
 But thy foul soul, which from its dark recess
 Trembling looks forth, beheld him void of art, 890
 Unwilling as he was, instructed him,
 And made him soon a master in deceit.

I am thy prisoner now ; ev'n now thou mean'st
 To drag me hence, from this unhappy shore,
 Where first thy malice left me, a poor exile, 895
 Deserted, friendless, and, though living, dead
 To all mankind. Perish the vile betrayer !

O ! I have cursed thee often, but the gods
 Will never hear the prayers of Philoctetes.
 Life and its joys are thine : while I, unhappy, 900
 Am but the scorn of thee and the Atridæ,
 Thy haughty masters : fraud and force compell'd
 thee,

Or thou hadst never sail'd with them to Troy.
 I lent my willing aid ; with seven brave ships
 I plough'd the main to serve them ; in return, 905
 They cast me forth, disgraced me, left me here.
 Thou say'st they did it ; they impute the crime
 To thee ; and what will you do with me now ?
 And whither must I go ? What end, what purpose,

902 Ulysses, unwilling to go among the other chiefs to the
 siege of Troy, feigned himself mad ; but being detected by Pala-
 medes, was after all obliged to join them.

Could urge thee to it? I am nothing, lost 910
 And dead already: wherefore, tell me, wherefore
 Am I not still the same detested burden,
 Loathsome and lame? Again must Philoctetes
 Disturb your holy rites? If I am with you,
 How can you make libations? That was once 915
 Your vile pretence for inhumanity.

O, may you perish for the deed! The gods
 Will grant it, sure, if justice be their care;
 And that it is I know. You had not left
 Your native soil, to seek a wretch like me, 920
 Had not some impulse from the powers above,
 Spite of yourselves, ordain'd it! O my country!
 And you, O gods! who look upon this deed,
 Punish, in pity to me, punish all
 The guilty band! Could I behold them perish, 925
 My wounds were nothing; that would heal them all.

CHOR. [*to Ulysses.*] Observe, my lord, what bitter-
 ness of soul

His words express! he bends not to misfortune,
 But seems to brave it.

ULYS. I could answer him,
 Were this a time for words; but now, no more 930
 Than this,—I act as best befits our purpose.
 Where virtue, truth, and justice are required,
 Ulysses yields to none; I was not born
 To be o'ercome, and yet submit to thee.
 Let him remain. Thy arrows shall suffice; 935
 We want thee not: Teucer can draw thy bow
 As well as thou; myself, with equal strength,
 Can aim the deadly shaft, with equal skill.
 What could thy presence do? Let Lemnos keep
 thee.

Farewell! perhaps the honours once design'd 940
 For thee may be reserved to grace Ulysses.

PHI. Alas! shall Greece then see my deadliest
 foe

Adorn'd with arms which I alone should bear?

ULYS. No more: I must be gone.

PHI. [*to Neoptolemus.*] Son of Achilles !
 Thou wilt not leave me too ? I must not lose 945
 Thy converse, thy assistance.

ULYS. [*to Neoptolemus.*] Look not on him :
 Away, I charge thee ; 'twould be fatal to us.

PHI. [*to the Chorus.*] Will you forsake me, friends ?
 Dwells no compassion
 Within your breasts for me ?

CHO. [*pointing to Neoptolemus.*] He is our master ;
 We speak and act but as his will directs. 950

NEO. I know he will upbraid me for this weakness ;
 But 'tis my nature and I must consent,
 Since Philoctetes asks it : stay you with him,
 Till to the gods our pious prayers we offer,
 And all things are prepared for our departure ; 955
 Perhaps, meantime, to better thoughts his mind
 May turn relenting. We must go : remember,
 When we shall call you, follow instantly.

[*Exit with Ulysses.*]

PHI. O my poor hut ! and is it then decreed
 Again I come to thee to part no more, 960
 To end my wretched days in this sad cave,
 The scene of all my woes ? For whither now
 Can I betake me ? Who will feed, support,
 Or cherish Philoctetes ? Not a hope 965
 Remains for me. O, that the impetuous storms
 Would bear me with them to some distant clime !
 For I must perish here.

CHO. Unhappy man !
 Thou hast provoked thy fate ; thyself alone
 Art to thyself a foe, to scorn the good
 Which wisdom bids thee take, and choose misfor-
 tune. 970

PHI. Wretch that I am, to perish here alone !
 O ! I shall see the face of man no more,
 Nor shall my arrows pierce their winged prey,
 And bring me sustenance ! Such vile delusions
 Used to betray me ! O that pains like those 975
 I feel might reach the author of my woes !

CHO. The gods decreed it; we are not to blame :
Heap not thy curses, therefore, on the guiltless,
But take our friendship.

PHI. [*pointing to the sea-shore.*] I behold him there :
Ev'n now I see him laughing me to scorn, 980
On yonder shore, and in his hands the darts
He waves triumphant, which no arms but these
Had ever borne. O, my dear, glorious treasure !
Hadst thou a mind to feel the indignity,
How wouldst thou grieve to change thy noble mas-
ter, 985

The friend of great Alcides, for a wretch
So vile, so base, so impious as Ulysses !

CHO. Justice will ever rule the good man's tongue,
Nor from his lips reproach and bitterness
Invidious flow. Ulysses, by the voice 990
Of Greece appointed, only sought a friend
To join the common cause, and serve his country.

PHI. Hear me, ye wing'd inhabitants of air !
And you who on these mountains love to feed,
My savage prey, whom once I could pursue ; 995
Fearful no more of Philoctetes, fly
This hollow rock ; I cannot hurt you now.
You need not dread to enter here : alas !
You now may come, and in your turn regale
On these poor limbs, when I shall be no more. 1000
Where can I hope for food ? or who can breathe
This vital air, when life-preserving earth
No longer will assist him !

CHO. By the gods
Let me entreat thee, if thou dost regard
Our master and thy friend, come to him now, 1005
While thou mayst 'scape this sad calamity.
Who but thyself would choose to be unhappy,
That could prevent it ?

PHI. O ! you have brought back
Once more the sad remembrance of my griefs.
Why, why, my friends, would you afflict me thus ?

CHO. Afflict thee, how ?

PHI. Think you I'll e'er return 1011
To hateful Troy?

CHO. We would advise thee to it.

PHI. I'll hear no more. Go, leave me.

CHO. That we shall
Most gladly : to the ships, my friends ! away.
Obey your orders. [going.]

PHI. *[stops them.]* By protecting Jove, 1015
Who hears the suppliant's prayer, do not forsake me.

CHO. *[returning.]* Be calm then.

PHI. O, my friends ! will you then stay ?
Do, by the gods I beg you.

CHO. Why that groan ?

PHI. Alas ! I die ! My wound, my wound ! Here—
after 1019

What can I do ? You will not leave me ; hear—

CHO. What canst thou say we do not know already ?

PHI. O'erwhelm'd by such a storm of griefs as I
am,

You should not thus resent a madman's phrensy.

CHO. Comply, then, and be happy.

PHI. Never, never,
(Be sure of that) though thunder-bearing Jove 1025
Should with his lightnings blast me, would I go.
No ; let Troy perish, perish all the host
Who sent me here to die ; but, O my friends !
Grant me this last request.

CHO. What is it. Speak. 1029

PHI. A sword, a dart, some instrument of death.

CHO. What wouldst thou do ?

PHI. I'd hack off every limb.
Death ! my soul longs for death.

CHO. But wherefore is it ?

PHI. I'll seek my father.

CHO. Whither ?

PHI. In the tomb ;
There he must be. O Scyros ! O my country !
How could I bear to see thee as I am ? 1035

I, who had left thy sacred shores, to aid
The hateful sons of Greece ! O misery !

[Goes into the cave.

[Exeunt.

ACT V.

ULYSSES, NEOPTOLEMUS, CHORUS.

CHO. Ere now we should have ta'en thee to our
ships,

But that advancing this way I behold

Ulysses, and with him Achilles' son. 1040

ULYS. Why this return ? Wherefore this haste ?

NEO. I come

To purge me of my crimes.

ULYS. Indeed ! what crimes ?

NEO. My blind obedience to the Grecian host,
And to thy counsels.

ULYS. Hast thou practised aught
Base, or unworthy of thee ?

NEO. Yes, by art 1045
And vile deceit betray'd the unhappy.

ULYS. Whom ?
Alas ! what mean you ?

NEO. Nothing ; but the son
Of Pæan—

ULYS. Ha ! what wouldst thou do ! My heart
Misgives me. [*aside.*]

NEO. I have ta'en his arms, and now—

ULYS. Thou wouldst restore them ! Speak ! is
that thy purpose ? 1050

Almighty Jove !

NEO. Unjustly should I keep
Another's right ?

ULYS. Now by the gods, thou mean'st
To mock me ; dost thou not ?

NEO. If to speak truth
Be mockery.

ULYS. And does Achilles' son
Say this to me?

NEO. Why force me to repeat 1055
My words so often to thee?

ULYS. Once to hear them,
Is once indeed too much.

NEO. Doubt them no more,
For I have told thee all.

ULYS. There are, remember,—
There are who may prevent thee.

NEO. Who shall dare
To thwart my purpose?

ULYS. All the Grecian host, 1060
And with them I.

NEO. Wise as thou art, Ulysses!
Thou talk'st most idly.

ULYS. Wisdom is not thine,
Either in word or deed.

NEO. Know, to be just
Is better far than to be wise.

ULYS. But where,
Where is the justice, thus unauthorized, 1065
To give a treasure back thou ow'st to me,
And to my counsels?

NEO. I have done a wrong,
And I will try to make atonement for it.

ULYS. Dost thou not fear the power of Greece?

NEO. I fear
Nor Greece nor thee when I am doing right. 1070

ULYS. 'Tis not with Troy, then, we contend, but
thee.

NEO. I know not that.

ULYS. Seest thou this hand? Behold,
It grasps my sword.

NEO. Mine is alike prepared,
Nor seeks delay.

ULYS. But I will let thee go; 1074
Greece shall know all thy guilt, and shall revenge it.

(Exit Ulysses.)

NEO. 'Twas well determined: always be as wise
As now thou art, and thou mayst live in safety.

[Approaching towards the cave.

Ho! son of Pæan! Philoctetes! leave
Thy rocky habitation, and come forth. 1079

PHI. [from the cave.] What noise was that? Who
calls on Philoctetes? [He comes out.

Alas! what would you, strangers? are you come
To heap fresh miseries on me?

NEO. Be of comfort,
And hear the tidings which I bring.

PHI. I dare not:
Thy flattering tongue already hath betray'd me. 1084

NEO. And is there, then, no room for penitence?

PHI. Such were thy words, when, seemingly, sin-
cere,

Yet meaning ill, thou stolest my arms away.

NEO. But now it is not so. I only came
To know if thou are resolute to stay,
Or sail with us.

PHI. No more of that; 'tis vain 1090
And useless all.

NEO. Art thou then fix'd?

PHI. I am?

It is impossible to say how firmly.

NEO. I thought I could have moved thee, but I've
done.

PHI. 'Tis well thou hast; thy labour had been
vain:

For never could my soul esteem the man 1095
Who robb'd me of my dearest, best possession,

And now would have me listen to his counsels.

Unworthy offspring of the best of men!

Perish the Atridæ! perish first Ulysses!

Perish thyself! 1100

NEO. Withhold thy imprecations,
And take thy arrows back.

PHI. A second time

Wouldst thou deceive me?

SOPH.—N

NEO. By the Almighty power
Of sacred Jove, I swear.

PHI. O joyful sound
If thou say'st truly.

NEO. Let my actions speak : 1104
Stretch forth thy hand, and take thy arms again.

[Gives him the arrows.

Enter ULYSSES.

ULYS. Witness, ye gods! here, in the name of
Greece
And the Atridæ, I forbid it!

PHI. Ha!
What voice is that? Ulysses?

ULYS. Ay, tis I;
I, who perforce will carry thee to Troy
Spite of Achilles' son.

PHI. [raising his arm as intending to throw an arrow
at Ulysses.] Not if I aim 1110
This shaft aright.

NEO. [laying hold of him.] Now, by the gods, I beg
thee,
Stop thy rash hand.

PHI. Let go my arm.

NEO. I will not.

PHI. Shall I not slay my enemy?

NEO. O no;

'Twould cast dishonour on us both.

PHI. Thou know'st
These Grecian chiefs are loud pretending boasters,
Brave but in tongue, and cowards in the field. 1116

NEO. I know it; but remember, I restored
Thy arrows to thee, and thou hast no cause
For rage, or for complaint against thy friend.

PHI. I own thy goodness: thou hast shown thyself
Worthy thy birth; no son of Sisyphus, 1121
But of Achilles, who on earth preserved
A fame unspotted, and among the dead
Still shines superior, an illustrious shade.

NEO. Joyful I thank thee for a father's praise, 1125

And for my own ; but listen to my words,
 And mark me well. Misfortunes, which the gods
 Inflict on mortals, they perforce must bear ;
 But when, oppress'd by voluntary woes,
 They make themselves unhappy, they deserve not
 Our pity or our pardon ; such art thou. 1131
 Thy savage soul, impatient of advice,
 Rejects the wholesome counsel of thy friend,
 And treats him like a foe : but I will speak,
 Jove be my witness ! therefore hear my words, 1135
 And grave them in thy heart. The dire disease
 Thou long hast suffer'd is from angry Heaven,
 Which thus afflicts thee for thy rash approach
 To the fell serpent, which on Chrysa's shore
 Watch'd o'er the sacred treasures ; know, beside,
 That while the sun in yonder east shall rise, 1141
 Or in the west decline, distemper'd still
 Thou ever shalt remain, unless to Troy
 Thy willing mind transport thee : there the sons
 Of Esculapius shall restore thee ; there, 1145
 By my assistance, shalt thou conquer Troy ;
 I know it well : for that prophetic sage,
 The Trojan captive Helenus, foretold
 It should be so ; " proud Troy," he added then,
 " This very year must fall ; if not, my life 1150
 Shall answer for the falsehood ;" therefore yield ;
 Thus to be deem'd the first of Grecians ; thus
 By Pæan's favorite sons to be restored,
 And thus mark'd out the conqueror of Troy,
 Is sure distinguish'd happiness.

PHI. O life 1155
 Detested ! why wilt thou still keep me here ?
 Why not dismiss me to the tomb ? Alas !
 What can I do ? How can I disbelieve
 My generous friend ? I must consent, and yet
 Can I do this, and look upon the sun ? 1160
 Can I behold my friends ? Will they forgive,
 Will they associate with me after this ?
 And you, ye heavenly orbs, that roll around me !

How will you bear to see me link'd with those
 Who have destroy'd me; ev'n the sons of Atreus,
 Ev'n with Ulysses, source of all my woes? 1166
 My sufferings past I could forget; but, O!
 I dread the woes to come; for well I know,
 When once the mind's corrupted, it brings forth
 Unnumber'd crimes, and ills to ills succeed. 1170
 It moves my wonder much, that thou, my friend,
 Shouldst thus advise me, whom it ill becomes
 To think of Troy: I rather had believed
 Thou wouldst have sent me far, far off from those
 Who have defrauded thee of thy just right, 1175
 And gave thy arms away. Are these the men
 Whom thou wouldst serve,—whom thou wouldst
 thus compel me

To save and to defend? It must not be.
 Remember, O my son! the solemn oath
 Thou gav'st to bear me to my native soil. 1180
 Do this, my friend! remain thyself at Scyros,
 And leave these wretches to be wretched still.
 Thus shalt thou merit double thanks, from me
 And from my father; nor by succour given
 To vile betrayers prove thyself as vile. 1185

NEO. Thou say'st most truly; yet confide in Heaven,
 Trust to thy friends, and leave this hated place.
 PHI. Leave it? For whom? For Troy and the
 Atridæ?

These wounds forbid it.

NEO. They shall all be heal'd,
 Where I will carry thee.

PHI. An idle tale 1190
 Thou tell'st me, surely, dost thou not?

NEO. I speak
 What best may serve us both.

PHI. But, speaking thus,
 Dost thou not fear the offended gods?

NEO. Why fear them?
 Can I offend the gods by doing good?

PHI. What good ? To whom ? To me, or to the Atridæ ? 1195

NEO. I am thy friend, and therefore would persuade thee.

PHI. And therefore give me to my foes.

NEO. Alas !

Let not misfortunes thus transport thy soul
To rage and bitterness.

PHI. Thou wouldst destroy me.

NEO. Thou know'st me not.

PHI. I know the Atridæ well, 1200
Who left me here.

NEO. They did ; yet they, perhaps,
Ev'n they, O Philoctetes ! may preserve thee.

PHI. I never will to Troy.

NEO. What's to be done !
Since I can ne'er persuade thee, I submit :
Live on in misery.

PHI. Then let me suffer ; 1205
Suffer I must ; but, O ! perform thy promise ;
Think on thy plighted faith, and guard me home
Instant, my friend ; nor ever call back Troy
To my remembrance. I have felt enough
From Troy already.

NEO. Let us go ; prepare. 1210

PHI. O glorious sound !

NEO. Bear thyself up.

PHI. I will,
If possible.

NEO. But how shall I escape
The wrath of Greece ?

PHI. O ! think not of it.

NEO. What
If they should waste my kingdom ?

PHI. I'll be there,—

NEO. Alas ! what canst thou do ?

PHI. And with these arrows 1215
Of my Alcides—

NEO. Ha ! what say'st thou ?

PHL. Drive
Thy foes before me ; not a Greek shall dare
Approach thy borders.

NEO. If thou wilt do this,
Salute the earth, and instant hence. Away !

Hercules descends and speaks.

Stay, son of Pæan ! Lo ! to thee 'tis given 1220
Once more to see and hear thy loved Alcides,
Who for thy sake hath left yon heavenly mansions,
And comes to tell thee the decrees of Jove ;
To turn thee from the paths thou mean'st to tread,
And guide thy footsteps right : therefore attend. 1225
Thou know'st what toils, what labours I endured,
Ere I by virtue gain'd immortal fame :
Thou too, like me, by toils must rise to glory ;
Thou too must suffer ere thou canst be happy. 1229
Hence with thy friend to Troy, where honour calls,
Where health awaits thee ; where, by virtue raised
To highest rank, and leader of the war,
Paris, its hateful author, shalt thou slay,
Lay waste proud Troy, and send thy trophies home,
Thy valour's due reward, to glad thy sire. 1235
On Cæta's top, the gifts which Greece bestows
Must thou reserve to grace my funeral pile,
And be a monument to after ages
Of these all-conquering arms. Son of Achilles

[turning to Neoptolemus.]

(For now to thee I speak) remember this ; 1240
Without his aid thou canst not conquer Troy,
Nor Philoctetes without thee succeed.
Go, then ; and, like two lions in the field
Roaming for prey, guard you each other well :
My Esculapius will I send ev'n now 1245
To heal thy wounds ; then go, and conquer Troy.
But when you lay the vanquished city waste,
Be careful that you venerate the gods ;
For far above all other gifts, doth Jove,
The almighty Father, hold true piety. 1250

Whether we live or die, that still survives
Beyond the reach of fate, and is immortal.

NEO. Once more to let me hear that wished-for
voice,

To see thee after so long a time, was bliss
I could not hope for. O ! I will obey 1255
Thy great commands most willingly.

PHI.

And I.

HER. Delay not, then ; for lo ! a prosperous wind
Swells in thy sail : the time invites. Adieu !

[*Hercules re-ascends.*]

PHI. I will but pay my salutations here,
And instantly depart. To thee, my cave ! 1260

Where I so long have dwelt, I bid farewell ;
And you, ye nymphs ! who on the watery plains
Deign to reside, farewell ! Farewell, the noise
Of beating waves, which I so oft have heard
From the rough sea, which, by the black winds
driven, 1265

O'erwhelmed me shivering. Oft the Hermæan
mount

Echoed my plaintive voice, by wintry storms
Afflicted, and return'd me groan for groan.
Now, ye fresh fountains ! each Lycæan spring !
I leave you now. Alas ! I little thought 1270
To leave you ever : and thou sea-girt isle,
Lemnos, farewell ! Permit me to depart
By thee unblamed, and with a prosperous gale
To go where fate demands, where kindest friends
By counsel urge me, where all-powerful Jove 1275
In his unerring wisdom hath decreed.

CHO. Let us be gone, and to the ocean nymphs
Our humble prayers prefer, that they would all
Propitious smile, and grant us safe return.

1266 A mountain in Lemnos.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

CREON, king of Thebes.

EURYDICE, wife of Creon.

HÆMON, son of Creon.

ANTIGONE, daughter of Œdipus.

ISMENE, sister of Antigone.

TIRESIAS, a prophet.

A MESSENGER, GUARD, SERVANT, and ATTENDANTS.

CHORUS, composed of ancient men of Thebes.

ANTIGONE.

ARGUMENT.

ETEOCLES and **Polynices**, sons of **Œdipus**, having an equal claim to the kingdom of Thebes, agreed to reign year by year, alternately; but **Eteocles**, succeeding first to the throne by priority of birth, broke the contract, and maintained himself in the possession of his dominions. **Polynices**, in revenge, raised an army of Argians, and made an incursion into Thebes; where, after great slaughter on both sides, the brothers were slain by each other in single combat. The kingdom now devolved to their uncle **Creon**, whose first act of supreme power was an edict, forbidding all rites of sepulture to **Polynices**, as a traitor; and pronouncing instant death on any who should dare to bury him. This inhuman decree, and the penalty that awaited its infraction, failed, however, to deter his sister **Antigone** from bestowing the last duties to her unfortunate brother; and, being detected in the prosecution of her design, she was sentenced by the tyrant to imprisonment in a cave, where she was to perish with hunger. **Hæmon**, the son of **Creon**, and the betrothed husband of **Antigone**, endeavoured, by his influence with his father, to arrest this cruel mandate; and, failing of success, slew himself. The punishment of **Creon** did not stop here: for his wife **Eurydice**, in despair for the death of her son, put a period to her existence; leaving the unhappy monarch to atone, by a fruitless remorse, for his past rigour and injustice.

ACT I.

ANTIGONE, ISMENE.

ANT. O my dear sister, my best-loved **Ismene**!
Is there an evil, by the wrath of Jove
Reserved for **Œdipus'** unhappy race,

We have felt not already ! Sorrow and shame,
 And bitterness and anguish,—all that's sad, 5
 All that's distressful, hath been ours ; and now
 This dreadful edict from the tyrant comes
 To double our misfortunes. Hast thou heard
 What harsh commands he hath imposed on all ?
 Or art thou still to know what future ills 10
 Our foes have yet in store to make us wretched ?

ISM. Since that unhappy day, Antigone !
 When by each other's hand our brothers fell,
 And Greece dismiss'd her armies, I have heard
 Nought that could give joy or grief to me. 15

ANT. I thought thou wert a stranger to the
 tidings ;
 And therefore call'd thee forth, that here alone
 I might impart them to thee.

ISM. O ! what are they ?
 For something dreadful labours in thy breast.

ANT. Know, then, from Creon, our indulgent
 lord, 20
 Our hapless brothers met a different fate ;
 To honour one, and one to infamy,
 He hath consign'd : with funeral rites he graced
 The body of our dear Eteocles,
 While Polynices' wretched carcass lies 25
 Unburied, unlamented, left exposed
 A feast for hungry vultures on the plain.
 No pitying friend will dare to violate
 The tyrant's harsh command, for public death
 Awaits the offender : Creon comes himself 30
 To tell us of it, such is our condition.
 This is the crisis, this the hour, Ismene !
 That must declare thee worthy of thy birth,
 Or show thee mean, base, and degenerate.

ISM. What wouldst thou have me do ? Defy his
 power ? 35
 Contemn the laws ?

ANT. To act with me, or not :
 Consider, and resolve.

ISM. What daring deed
Wouldst thou attempt? What is it? Speak!
ANT. To join

And take the body, my Ismene.

ISM. Ha!
And wouldst thou dare to bury it, when thus 40
We are forbidden?

ANT. Ay, to bury him :
He is my brother, and thine, too, Ismene !
Therefore, consent or not, I have determined
I'll not disgrace my birth.

ISM. Hath not the king
Pronounced it death to all?

ANT. He hath no right, 45
No power to keep me from my own.

ISM. Alas!
Remember our unhappy father's fate ;
His eyes torn out by his own fatal hand,
Oppress'd with shame and infamy, he died :
Fruit of his crimes, a mother and a wife, 50
Dreadful alliance ! self-devoted, fell ;
And last, in one sad day, Eteocles
And Polynices, by each other slain.
Left as we are, deserted and forlorn,
What from our disobedience can we hope, 55
But misery and ruin ? Poor, weak women,
Helpless, nor form'd by nature to contend
With powerful man ; we are his subjects too.
Therefore to this, and worse than this, my sister,
We must submit ; for me, in humblest prayer 60
Will I address me to the infernal powers
For pardon of that crime, which, well they know,
Sprang from necessity, and then obey ;
Since to attempt what we can never hope
To execute, is folly all, and madness. 65

ANT. Wert thou to proffer what I do not ask,—
Thy poor assistance, I would scorn it now.
Act as thou wilt ; I'll bury him myself ;
Let me perform but that, and death is welcome.

SOPH.—O

I'll do the pious deed, and lay me down 70
 By my dear brother ; loving and beloved,
 We'll rest together : to the powers below,
 'Tis fit we pay obedience ; longer there
 We must remain, than we can breathe on earth ;
 There I shall dwell for ever ; thou, meantime, 75
 What the gods hold most precious mayst despise.

ISM. I reverence the gods ; but, in defiance
 Of laws, and unassisted, to do this,
 It were most dangerous.

ANT. That be thy excuse,
 While I prepare the funeral pile.

ISM. Alas ! 80
 I tremble for thee.

ANT. Tremble for thyself,
 And not for me.

ISM. O ! do not tell thy purpose,
 I beg thee, do not ! I shall ne'er betray thee.

ANT. I'd have it known ; and I shall hate thee
 more

For thy concealment, than if loud to all 85
 Thou wouldst proclaim the deed.

ISM. Thou hast a heart
 Too daring, and ill-suited to thy fate.

ANT. I know my duty, and I'll pay it there
 Where 'twill be best accepted.

ISM. Couldst thou do it ;
 But 'tis not in thy power.

ANT. When I know that, 90
 It will be time enough to quit my purpose.

ISM. It cannot be ; 'tis folly to attempt it.

ANT. Go on, and I shall hate thee : our dead bro-
 ther,

He too shall hate thee as his bitterest foe.
 Go, leave me here to suffer for my rashness ; 95

Whate'er befalls, it cannot be so dreadful
 As not to die with honour.

ISM. Then farewell,

Since thou wilt have it so ; and know, Ismene
Pities thy weakness, but admires thy virtue.

[*Exeunt.*]

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

By Dirce's sweetly-flowing stream, 100
Ne'er did the golden eye of day
On Thebes with fairer lustre beam,
Or shine with more auspicious ray.
See, the proud Argive, with his silver shield
And glittering armour, quits the hostile plain ;
No longer dares maintain the luckless field, 106
But vanquish'd flies, nor checks the loosen'd rein.
With dreadful clangour, like the bird of Jove,
On snowy wings descending from above,
His vaunted powers to this devoted land, 110
In bitterest wrath, did Polynices lead :
With crested helmets, and a numerous band
He came, and fondly hoped that Thebes should
bleed.

ANTISTROPHE I.

High on the lofty tower he stood,
And view'd the encircled gates below, 115
With spears that thirsted for our blood,
And seem'd to scorn the unequal foe :
But fraught with vengeance, ere the rising flame
Could waste our bulwarks, or our walls surround,
Mars to assist the fiery serpent came, 120
And brought the towering eagle to the ground.
That god, who hates the boastings of the proud,
Saw the rude violence of the exulting crowd.
Already now the triumph was prepared,
The wreath of victory, and the festal song, 125
When Jove the clash of golden armour heard,
And hurl'd his thunder on the guilty throng.

120 By the dragon, or fiery serpent, we are to understand the
Theban army attacked by the eagle Polynices.

STROPHE II.

Then Capaneus, elate with pride,
 Fierce as the rapid whirlwind came ;
 Eager he seem'd on every side 130
 To spread the all-devouring flame :
 But soon he felt the winged lightning's blast,
 By angry Heaven with speedy vengeance sent :
 Down from the lofty turrets headlong cast,
 For his foul crimes he met the punishment. 135
 Each at his gate, long time the leaders strove,
 Then fled, and left their arms to conquering Jove ;
 Save the unhappy death-devoted pair,
 The wretched brethren, who unconquer'd stood :
 With rancorous hate inspired, and fell despair, 140
 They wreak'd their vengeance in each other's
 blood.

ANTISTROPHE II.

And lo ! with smiles propitious see,
 To Thebes, for numerous scars renown'd !
 The goddess comes, fair Victory,
 With fame and endless glory crown'd ! 145
 Henceforth, no longer vex'd by war's alarms,
 Let all our sorrows, all our labours cease :
 Come, let us quit the din of rattling arms,
 And fill our temples with the songs of peace.
 The god of Thebes shall guide our steps aright, 150
 And crown with many a lay the festive night.
 But see, still anxious for his native land,
 Our king, Menœceus' valiant son, appear :
 With some fair omen, by the gods' command, 154
 He comes to meet his aged council here. [*Exeunt.*]

128 Capaneus was one of the seven captains who came against Thebes. It is said that, after he had mounted to the top of the scaling-ladders, he was struck dead with lightning.

ACT II.

CREON, CHORUS.

CRE. At length, our empire, shook by civil broils,
 The gods to peace and safety have restored;
 Wherefore, my friends! you had our late request
 That you should meet us here; for well I know
 Your firm allegiance to great Laius, next 160
 To Œdipus, and his unhappy sons;
 These by each other's hand untimely slain,
 To me the sceptre doth of right descend,
 As next in blood. Never can man be known,
 His mind, his will, his passions ne'er appear, 165
 Till power and office call them forth; for me,
 'Tis my firm thought, and I have held it ever,
 That he who rules, and doth not follow that
 Which wisdom counsels, but, restrained by fear,
 Shuts up his lips, must be the worst of men; 170
 Nor do I deem him worthy, who prefers
 A friend, how dear soever, to his country.
 Should I behold (witness, all-seeing Jove!)
 This city wrong'd, I never would be silent;
 Never would make the foe of Thebes my friend,
 For on her safety must depend our own; 176
 And if she flourish, we can never want
 Assistance or support: thus would I act;
 And therefore have I sent my edict forth
 Touching the sons of Œdipus, commanding 180
 That they should bury him who nobly fought
 And died for Thebes, the good Eteocles,
 Gracing his memory with each honour due
 To the illustrious dead; for Polynices,
 Abandoned exile! for a brother's blood 185
 Thirsting insatiate;—he, who would in flames
 Have wasted all, his country, and his gods,
 And made you slaves;—I have decreed, he lie
 Unburied, his vile carcass to the birds

And hungry dogs a prey ; there let him rot 190
 Inglorious ; 'tis my will : for ne'er from me
 Shall vice inherit virtue's due reward,
 But him alone, who is a friend to Thebes,
 Living or dead, shall Creon reverence still.

CHO. Son of Menœceus ! 'twas thy great behest
 Thus to reward them both ; thine is the power 19
 Oe'r all supreme, the living and the dead.

CRE. Be careful, then, my orders are obey'd.

CHO. O, sir ! to younger hands commit the task.

CRE. I have appointed some to watch the body.

CHO. What then remains for us ?

CRE. To see that none, 201
 By your connivance, violate the law.

CHO. Scarce will the man be found so fond of
 death

As to attempt it.

CRE. Death is the reward
 Of him who dares it ; but oftentimes by hope 205
 Of sordid gain, are men betray'd to ruin.

Enter MESSENGER.

MES. O, king ! I cannot boast that, hither sent,
 I came with speed, for oft my troubled thoughts
 Have driven me back : oft to myself I said,
 " Why dost thou seek destruction ? Yet again 210
 If thou report it not, from other tongues
 Creon must hear the tale, and thou wilt suffer."
 With doubts like these oppress'd, slowly I came,
 And the short way seem'd like a tedious journey.
 At length I come, resolved to tell thee all : 215
 Whate'er the event, I must submit to fate.

CRE. Whence are thy fears, and why this hesi-
 tation ?

MES. First for myself ; I merit not thy wrath ;
 It was not I, nor have I seen the man
 Who did the guilty deed.

CRE. Something of weight 220
 Thou hast to impart, by this unusual care
 To guard thee from our anger.

MES. Fear will come
Where danger is.

CRE. Speak, and thou hast thy pardon.

MES. The body of Polynices some rash hand
Hath buried, scatter'd o'er his corpse the dust, 225
And funeral rites perform'd.

CRE. Who dared do this?

MES. 'Tis yet unknown: no mark of instrument
Is left behind; the earth still level all,
Nor worn by track of chariot-wheel. The guard,
Who watch'd that day, call it a miracle; 236
No tomb was raised; light lay the scatter'd earth,
As only meant to avoid the imputed curse;
Nor could we trace the steps of dog or beast
Passing that way. Instant a tumult rose;
The guards accused each other; naught was proved,
But each suspected each, and all denied, 238
Offering, in proof of innocence, to grasp
The burning steel, to walk through fire, and take
Their solemn oath they knew not of the deed.
At length, one mightier than the rest proposed 240
(Nor could we think of better means) that all
Should be to thee discover'd: 'twas my lot
To bring the unwelcome tidings; and I come
To pour my news, unwilling, into ears
Unwilling to receive it; for I know 245
None ever loved the messenger of ill.

CHO. To me it seems as if the hand of Heaven
Were in this deed.

CRE. Be silent, ere my rage,
Thou rash old man! pronounce thee fool and dotard.
Horrid suggestion! think'st thou then the gods 250
Take care of men like these? Would they preserve
Or honour him who came to burn their altars,
Profane their rites, and trample on their laws?
Will they reward the bad? It cannot be:
But well I know, the murmuring citizens 255
Brook'd not our mandate, shook their heads in secret,
And, ill-affected to me, would not stoop

Their haughty crests, or bend beneath my yoke :
 By hire corrupted, some of these have dared
 The venturous deed. Gold is the worst of ills 260
 That ever plagued mankind ; this wastes our cities,
 Drives forth their natives to a foreign soil,
 Taints the pure heart, and turns the virtuous mind
 To basest deeds ; artificer of fraud
 Supreme, and source of every wickedness. 265
 The wretch, corrupted for this hateful purpose,
 Must one day suffer ; for, observe me well ;
 As I revere that Power by whom I swear,
 Almighty Jove ; if you conceal him from me,
 If to my eyes you do not bring the traitor, 270
 Know, death alone shall not suffice to glut
 My vengeance : living shall you hang in torments,
 Till you confess, till you have learn'd from me
 There is a profit not to be desired ;
 And own, dishonest gains have ruin'd more 275
 Than they have saved.

MES. O king ! may I depart,
 Or wait thy farther orders ?

CRE. Know'st thou not
 Thy speech is hateful ? Hence !

MES. Wherefore, my lord ?

CRE. Know you not why ?

MES. I but offend your ear ;
 They who have done the deed afflict your soul. 280

CRE. Away ; thy talk but makes thy guilt appear.

MES. My lord, I did not do it.

CRE. Thou hast sold
 Thy life for gain.

MES. 'Tis cruel to suspect me.

CRE. Thou talk'st it bravely ; but remember all,
 Unless you do produce him, you shall find 285
 The miseries which on ill-got wealth await. [*Exit.*]

MES. Would he were found ! that we must leave
 to fate.

Be it as it may, I never will return.

Thus safe beyond my hopes, 'tis fit I pay
My thanks to the kind gods who have preserved me.
[Exit.]

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

Since first this active world began, 291
Nature is busy all in every part ;
But, passing all in wisdom and in art,
Superior shines inventive man ;
Fearless of wintry winds and circling waves, 295
He rides the ocean and the tempest braves :
On him, unwearied Earth, with lavish hand,
Immortal goddess ! all her bounty pours ;
Patient beneath the rigid plough's command, 299
Year after year she yields her plenteous stores.

ANTISTROPHE I.

'To drive the natives of the wood
From their rude haunts, or in the cruel snare
To catch the wing'd inhabitants of air,
Or trap the scaly brood !
To tame the fiery courser, yet unbroke 305
With the hard rein, or to the untried yoke
To bend the mountain bull, who, wildly free,
O'er the steep rocks had wander'd unconfin'd ;
These are the arts of mortal industry,
And such the subtle power of human kind. 310

STROPHE II.

By learning and fair science crown'd,
Behold him now full fraught with wisdom's lore,
The laws of nature anxious to explore,
With depth of thought profound :
But naught, alas ! can human wisdom see 315
In the dark bosom of futurity :
The power of Wisdom may awhile prevail,
Awhile suspend a mortal's fleeting breath ;
But never can her fruitless arts avail,
To conquer fate, or stop the hand of death. 320

ANTISTROPHE II.

Man's ever active, changeful will,
 Sometimes to good shall bend his virtuous mind;
 Sometimes behold him to foul deeds inclined,
 And prone to every ill.

Who guiltless keeps the laws is still approved 325
 By every tongue, and by his country loved ;

But he who doth not, from his native land
 A wretched exile, far, O ! far from me,
 May he be driven, by angry Heaven's command,
 And live devote to shame and infamy ! 330

CHO. Amazement ! can it be Antigone,
 Or do my eyes deceive me ? No, she comes.
 O wretched daughter of a wretched father !
 Hast thou transgress'd the laws, and art thou taken
 In this adventurous deed, unhappy maid ? 335

Enter ANTIGONE and GUARD.

GUARD. Behold the woman who hath done the
 deed ;
 In the very act of burial we surprised her.
 Where is the king ?

CHO. Return'd as we could wish ;
 Ev'n now he comes this way.

Enter CREON.

CRE. Whom have we here ?
 Doth Justice smile upon us ?

GUARD. O my lord ! 340
 Never should man too confident assert,
 Much less by oath should bind himself to aught ;
 For soon our judgments change, and one opinion
 Destroys another. By thy threats alarm'd,
 But now I vow'd I never would return : 345
 Yet, thus preserved beyond my hopes, I come,
 Bound by that duty which I owe to thee
 And to my country, to bring here this virgin,
 Whom, as she sprinkled o'er her brother's dust
 The varied wreath, we seized : the willing task 350

Was mine, nor as of late by lot determin'd.
Receive her, then, O king! judge and condemn
The guilty, as it best becomes thy wisdom;
Henceforth I stand acquitted.

CRE. But say, how,
Where didst thou find her?

GUARD. To say all, 'twas she 355
Who buried Polynices.

CRE. Art thou sure?

GUARD. These eyes beheld her.

CRE. But say, how discover'd?

GUARD. Thus then it was: no sooner had I left
thee,

Than, mindful of thy wrath, with careful hands
From off the putrid carcass we removed 360
The scatter'd dust; then, to avoid the stench
Exhaling noisome, to a hill retired;
There watch'd at distance, till the mid-day sun
Scorch'd o'er our heads: sudden a storm arose,
Shook every leaf, and rattled through the grove, 365
Filling the troubled element. We closed
Our eyes, and patient bore the wrath of Heaven:
At length the tempest ceased; when we beheld
This virgin issuing forth, and heard her cries
Distressful, like the plaintive bird, who views 370
The plunder'd nest, and mourns her ravish'd young:
Ev'n thus the maid, when on the naked corse
She cast her eyes, loud shriek'd, and cursed the hand
That did the impious deed; then sprinkled o'er
The crumbled earth; and from a brazen urn, 375
Of richest work, to the loved relics thrice
Her due libations poured; we saw, and straight
Pursued her; unappall'd she seemed, and still,
As we did question her, confess'd it all.
It pleased, and yet methought it grieved me too.
To find ourselves released from wo, is bliss 381
Supreme; but thus to see our friends unhappy,
Imbitters all. I must be thankful still
For my own safety, which I hold most dear.

CRE. Speak thou, who bend'st to earth thy drooping head: 385

Dost thou deny the fact?

ANT. Deny it? no:

CRE. [*to the Guard.*] Retire, for thou art free; and now, [*turning to ANTIGONE.*

Be brief and tell me: heardst thou our decree?

ANT. I did; 'twas public: how could I avoid it?

CRE. And darest thou, then, to disobey the law?

ANT. I had it not from Jove, nor the just gods 391
Who rule below; nor could I ever think
A mortal's law of power or strength sufficient
To abrogate the unwritten law divine,
Immutable, eternal, not like these 395
Of yesterday, but made ere time began.
Shall man persuade me, then, to violate
Heaven's great commands, and make the gods my
foes?

Without thy mandate, death had one day come;
For who shall 'scape it? and if now I fall 400
A little sooner, 'tis the thing I wish.
To those who live in misery, like me,
Believe me, king! 'tis happiness to die.
Without remorse I shall embrace my fate;
But to my brother had I left the rites 405
Of sepulture unpaid, I then indeed
Had been most wretched. This to thee may seem
Madness and folly; if it be, 'tis fit
I should act thus: it but resembles thee.

CRE. Sprung from a sire perverse and obstinate,
Like him, she cannot bend beneath misfortune: 411
But know, the proudest hearts may be subdued.
Hast thou not mark'd the hardest steel by fire
Made soft and flexible? Myself have seen 415
By a slight rein the fiery courser held.
'Tis not for slaves to be so haughty; yet
This proud offender, not content, it seems,
To violate my laws, adds crime to crime;

Smiles at my threats, and glories in her guilt.
 If I should suffer her to 'scape my vengeance, 420
 She were the man, not I: but though she sprang
 Ev'n from my sister, were I bound to her
 By ties more dear than is Hercæan Jove,
 She should not 'scape: her sister too, I find
 Accomplice in the deed. Go, call her forth: 425

[to one of the attendants.]

She is within; I saw her raving there,
 Her senses lost; the common fate of those
 Who practise dark and deadly wickedness.

[turning to ANTIGONE.]

I cannot bear to see the guilty stand
 Convicted of their crimes, and yet pretend 430
 To gloss them o'er with specious names of virtue.

ANT. I am thy captive; thou wouldst have my
 life:

Will that content thee?

CRE. Yes, 'tis all I wish.

ANT. Why this delay, then, when thou know'st
 my words

To thee as hateful are as thine to me? 435

Therefore despatch: I cannot live to do

A deed more glorious; and so these would all

[pointing to the Chorus.]

Confess, were not their tongues restrain'd by fear.

It is the tyrant's privilege, we know,

To speak and act whate'er he please uncensur'd. 440

CRE. Lives there another in the land of Thebes,
 Who thinks as thou dost?

ANT. Yes, a thousand; these,
 These think so too, but dare not utter it.

CRE. Dost thou not blush?

ANT. For what? Why blush to pay
 A sister's duty?

423 Jupiter Hercæus, so called from being the guardian of
 every man's private habitation; in times of war and calamity
 altars were erected to him, to which the unhappy fled as an asy-
 lum.

SOPH.—P

CRE. But, Eteocles, 445
Say, was not he thy brother too ?

ANT. He was.

CRE. Why then thus reverence him who least
deserved it ?

ANT. Perhaps that brother thinks not so.

CRE. He must,
If thou pay'st equal honour to them both.

ANT. He was a brother, not a slave.

CRE. One fought 450
Against that country which the other saved.

ANT. But equal death the rights of sepulture
Decrees to both.

CRE. What ! reverence alike
The guilty and the innocent ?

ANT. Perhaps
The gods below esteem it just.

CRE. A foe, 455
Though dead, should as a foe be treated still.

ANT. My love shall go with thine, but not my
hate.

CRE. Go, then, and love them in the tomb ; but
know,
No woman rules in Thebes while Creon lives.

CHO. Lo ! at the portal stands the fair Ismene ;
Tears in her lovely eyes, a cloud of grief 461
Sits on her brow, wetting her beauteous cheek
With pious sorrow for a sister's fate.

Enter ISMENE.

CRE. Come forth ! thou serpent ! little did I think
That I had nourish'd two such deadly foes, 465
To suck my blood, and cast me from my throne.
What sayest thou ? Wert thou accomplice in the
deed,

Or wilt thou swear that thou art innocent ?

ISM. I do acknowledge it, if she permit me,
I was accomplice, and the crime was mine. 470

ANT. 'Tis false ; thou didst refuse, nor would I
hold
Communion with thee.

ISM. But in thy misfortunes
Let me partake, my sister ! let me be
A fellow-sufferer with thee.

ANT. Witness, Death,
And ye infernal gods ! to which belongs 475
The great, the glorious deed. I do not love
These friends in word alone.

ISM. Antigone !
Do not despise me ; I but ask to die
With thee, and pay due honours to the dead.

ANT. Pretend not to a merit which thou hast not.
Live thou ; it is enough for me to perish. 481

ISM. But what is life without thee ?

ANT. Ask thy friend
And patron there. [pointing to Creon.

ISM. Why that unkind reproach,
When thou shouldst rather comfort me ?

ANT. Alas !
It gives me pain, when I am forced to speak 485
So bitterly against thee.

ISM. Is there aught
That I can do to save thee ?

ANT. Save thyself :
I shall not envy thee.

ISM. And will you not
Permit me then to share your fate ?

ANT. Thy choice
Was life ; 'tis mine to die.

ISM. I told thee oft 490
It would be so.

ANT. Thou didst, and was't not well
Thus to fulfil thy prophecy ?

ISM. The crime
Was mutual, mutual be the punishment.

ANT. Fear not : thy life is safe ; but mine long
since
Devoted to the dead.

CRE. Both seem deprived 495
Of reason; one, indeed, was ever thus.

ISM. O king! the mind doth seldom keep her
seat,
When sunk beneath misfortunes.

CRE. Sunk indeed
Thou wert in wretchedness to join with her.

ISM. But what is life without Antigone? 500

CRE. Then think not of it; for she is no more.

ISM. Wouldst thou destroy thy son's long-destin'd
wife?

CRE. O! we shall find a fitter bride.

ISM. Alas!
He will not think so.

CRE. I'll not wed my son
To a base woman.

ANT. O, my dearest Hæmon! 505
And is it thus thy father doth disgrace thee?

CRE. Such an alliance were as hateful to me
As is thyself.

ISM. Wilt thou then take her from him?

CRE. Their nuptials shall be finished by death.

ISM. She then must perish?

CRE. So must you and I. 510
Therefore no more delay: go, take them hence;
Confine them both: henceforth they shall not stir.
When death is near at hand, the bravest fly.

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

Thrice happy they whose days in pleasure flow;
Who never taste the bitter cup of wo: 515

For when the wrath of Heaven descends

On some devoted house, there foul disgrace,

With Grief and all her train, attends,

And shame and sorrow overwhelm the wretched
race; 519

Ev'n as the Thracian sea, when vex'd with storms,
While darkness hangs incumbent o'er the deep,

When the black North the troubled scene deforms,
 And the black sands in rapid whirlwinds sweep;
 The groaning waves beat on the trembling shore,
 And echoing hills rebellow to the roar. 525

ANTISTROPHE I.

O Labdacus! thy house must perish all.
 Ev'n now I see the stately ruin fall;
 Shame heap'd on shame, and ill on ill,
 Disgrace and never-ending woes;
 Some angry god pursues thee still, 530
 Nor grants or safety or repose:
 One fair and lovely branch unwithered stood,
 And braved the inclement skies;
 But Pluto comes, inexorable god!
 She sinks, she raves, she dies. 535

STROPHE II.

Shall man below control the gods above?
 Or human pride restrain the power of Jove?
 Whose eyes by all-subduing sleep
 Are never clos'd, as feeble mortals' are;
 But still their watchful vigils keep 540
 Through the large circle of the eternal year.
 Great lord of all, whom neither time nor age,
 With envious stroke, can weaken or decay;
 He who alone the future can presage,
 Who knows alike to-morrow as to-day; 545
 While wretched man is doom'd, by Heaven's decree,
 To toil and pain, to sin and misery.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Ofttimes the flatterer Hope, that joy inspires,
 Fills the proud heart of man with fond desires.
 He, careless traveller, wanders still 550
 Through life, unmindful of deceit;
 Nor dreads the danger till he feel
 The burning sands beneath his feet.
 When Heaven impels to guilt the maddening mind,
 Then good like ill appears; 555
 And vice, for universal hate design'd,
 The face of virtue wears.

[Exeunt.]

ACT III.

CREON, HÆMON, CHORUS.

CHO. BEHOLD, O king ! thy youngest hope appear,
The noble Hæmon ; lost in grief he seems,
Weeping the fate of poor Antigone. 560

CRE. He comes, and better than a prophet, soon
Shall we divine his inmost thoughts. My son,
Com'st thou, well knowing our decree, to mourn
Thy promised bride, and angry to dispute
A father's will ; or, whatsoe'er we do 565
Still to hold best, and pay obedience to us ?

HÆM. My father, I am thine ; do thou command,
And I in all things shall obey : 'tis fit
My promised nuptial rites give place to thee.

CRE. It will become thee with obedience thus
To bear thee ever, and in every act 571
To yield submissive to a father's will.
'Tis therefore, O my son ! that men do pray
For children, who with kind officious duty
May guard their helpless age, resist their foes, 575
And, like their parents, love their parents' friend :
But he who gets a disobedient child,
What doth he get but misery and wo ?
His enemies will laugh the wretch to scorn.
Take heed, my son, thou yield not up thy reason,
In hopes of pleasure from a worthless woman ; 581
For cold is the embrace of impious love,
And deep the wounds of false, dissembled friendship.
Hate, then, thy bitterest foe, despise her arts,
And leave her to be wedded to the tomb. 585
Of all the city, her alone I found
Rebellious ; but I have her, nor shall Thebes
Say I'm a liar ; I pronounced her fate,
And she must perish : let her call on Jove,
Who guards the rites of kindred, and the ties 590
Of nature ; for if those by blood united
Transgress the laws, I hold myself more near

Ev'n to a stranger : who in private life
 Is just and good, will to his country too
 Be faithful ever ; but the man who, proud 595
 And fierce of soul, contemns authority,
 Despiseth justice, and o'er those who rule
 Would have dominion, such shall never gain
 The applauding voice of Creon. He alone,
 Whom the consenting citizens approve, 600
 The acknowledged sovereign, should in all com-
 mand ;

Just or unjust his laws, in things of great
 Or little import ;—whatsoe'er he bids,
 A subject is not to dispute his will ;
 He knows alike to rule and to obey ; 605
 And in the day of battle will maintain
 The foremost rank, his country's best defence.
 Rebellion is the worst of human ills :
 This ruins kingdoms, this destroys the peace
 Of noblest families, this wages war, 610
 And puts the brave to flight ; while fair obedience
 Keeps all in safety : to preserve it, ever
 Should be a king's first care. We will not yield
 To a weak woman : if we must submit,
 At least we will be conquered by a man, 615
 Nor by a female arm thus fall inglorious.

HÆM. Wisdom, my father, is the noblest gift
 That gods bestow on man, and better far
 Than all his treasures : what thy judgment deems
 Most fit I cannot, would not reprehend. 620
 Others, perhaps, might call it wrong ; for me,
 My duty only bids me to inform you
 If aught be done or said that casts reproach
 Or blame on you. Such terror would thy looks
 Strike on the low plebeian, that he dare not 625
 Say aught displeasing to thee : be it mine
 To tell thee, then, what I of late have heard
 In secret whisper'd. Your afflicted people
 United mourn the unhappy virgin's fate
 Unmerited, most wretched of her sex, 630

To die for deeds of such distinguish'd virtue;
 For that she would not let a brother lie
 Unburied, to the dogs and birds a prey.
 "Was it not rather," say the murm'ring crowd,
 "Worthy of golden honours and fair praise?" 635
 Such are their dark and secret discontents.
 Thy welfare and thy happiness alone
 Are all my wish: what can a child desire
 More than a father's honour! or a father
 More than a child's! O! do not then retain 640
 Thy will, and still believe no sense but thine
 Can judge aright: the man who proudly thinks
 None but himself or eloquent or wise,
 By time betray'd, is branded for an idiot.
 True wisdom will be ever glad to learn, 645
 And not too fond of power. Observe the trees,
 That bend to wintry torrents; how their boughs
 Unhurt remain; while those that brave the storm,
 Uprooted torn, shall wither and decay.
 The pilot, whose unslackened sail defies 650
 Contending winds, with shatter'd bark pursues
 His dangerous course. Then mitigate thy wrath,
 My father, and give way to sweet repentance.
 If to my youth be aught of judgment given,
 He who by knowledge and true wisdom's rules 655
 Guides every action, is the first of men:
 But since to few that happiness is given,
 The next is he who, not too proud to learn,
 Follows the counsels of the wise and good.

CHO. O king! if right the youth advise, 'tis fit
 That thou shouldst listen to him; so to thee 661
 Should he attend, as best may profit both.

CRE. And have we lived so long then, to be taught
 At last our duty by a boy like thee!

HÆM. Young though I am, I still may judge aright:
 Wisdom in action lies, and not in years. 666

CRE. Call you it wisdom then to honour those
 Who disobey the laws!

HÆM. I would not have thee
Protect the wicked.

CRE. Is she not most guilty ?

HÆM. Thebes doth not think her so.

CRE. Shall Thebes prescribe
To Creon's will ? 670

HÆM. How weakly dost thou talk !

CRE. Am I king here, or shall another reign ?

HÆM. 'Tis not a city where but one man rules.

CRE. The city is the king's.

HÆM. Go by thyself then,
And rule henceforth o'er a deserted land. 675

CRE. [*to the Chorus*] He pleads the woman's cause.

HÆM. If thou art she,
I do ; for, O ! I speak but for thy sake ;
My care is all for thee.

CRE. Abandoned wretch !
Dispute a father's will ?

HÆM. I see thee err,
And therefore do it.

CRE. Is it then a crime 680
To guard my throne and rights from violation ?

HÆM. He cannot guard them who contemns the
gods,
And violates their laws.

CRE. O ! thou art worse,
More impious ev'n than she thou hast defended.

HÆM. Naught have I done to merit this reproof.

CRE. Hast thou not pleaded for her ? 686

HÆM. No ; for thee,
And for myself ; for the infernal gods.

CRE. But know she shall not live to be thy wife.

HÆM. Then she must die : another too may fall.

CRE. Ha ! dost thou threaten me ? Audacious
traitor ! 690

HÆM. What are my threats ? Alas ! thou heed'st
them not.

CRE. That thou shalt see ; thy insolent instruction
Shall cost thee dear.

HÆM. But, for thou art my father,
Now would I say thy senses were impaired.

CRE. Think not to make me thus thy scorn and
laughter, 695
Thou woman's slave !

HÆM. Still wouldst thou speak thyself,
And never listen to the voice of truth :
Such is thy will.

CRE. Now, by Olympus here
I swear, thy vile reproaches shall not pass
Unpunish'd : call her forth : before her bridegroom
[to one of the attendants.
She shall be brought, and perish in his sight. 701

HÆM. These eyes shall never see it : let the
slaves
Who fear thy rage, submit to it ; but know,
'Tis the last time thou shalt behold thy son.

[Exit Hæmon.

CHO. Sudden in anger fled the youth. O king !
A mind oppress'd like his is desperate. 706

CRE. Why, let him go ; and henceforth better
learn

Than to oppose me : be it as it may,
Death is their portion, and he shall not save them.

CHO. Must they both die then ?

CRE. No ; 'tis well advised :
Ismene lives ; but for Antigone,— 711

CHO. O king ! what death is she decreed to suffer ?

CRE. Far from the hands of men I'll have her led,
And in a rocky cave beneath the earth,
Buried alive ; with her a little food, 715
Enough to save the city from pollution :
There let her pray the only god she worships
To save her from this death : perhaps he will ;
Or if he doth not, let her learn how vain
It is to reverence the powers below. [Exit Creon.

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

Mighty power, all powers above ! 721
 Great unconquerable Love !
 Thou who liest in dimple sleek,
 On the tender virgin's cheek ;—
 Thee the rich and great obey ; 725
 Every creature owns thy sway.
 O'er the wide earth and o'er the main
 Extends thy universal reign ;
 All thy maddening influence know,
 Gods above and men below : 730
 All thy powers resistless prove,
 Great unconquerable Love !

ANTISTROPHE I.

Thou canst lead the just astray
 From wisdom and from virtue's way :
 The ties of nature cease to bind, 735
 When thou disturb'st the captive mind.
 Behold, enslaved by fond desire,
 The youth contemns his aged sire ;
 Enamour'd of his beauteous maid,
 Nor laws nor parents are obey'd : 740
 Thus Venus wills it from above,
 And great, unconquerable Love.

CHO. Ev'n I, beyond the common bounds of grief,
 Indulge my sorrows ; and from these sad eyes
 Fountains of tears will flow, when I behold 745
 Antigone, unhappy maid, approach
 The bed of death, and hasten to the tomb.

Enter ANTIGONE.

ANT. Farewell, my friends ! my countrymen, fare-
 well !
 Here on her last sad journey you behold
 The poor Antigone ; for never more 750
 Shall I return, or view the light of day.
 The hand of death conducts me to the shore

Of dreary Acheron ; no nuptial song
Reserved for me, the wretched bride alone
Of Pluto now, and wedded to the tomb. 755

CHO. Be it thy glory still, that by the sword
Thou fall'st not, nor the slow-consuming hand
Of foul distemperature ; but, far distinguished
Above thy sex, and to thyself a law,
Doom'st thy own death : so shall thy honour live, 760
And future ages venerate thy name.

ANT. Thus Tantalus' unhappy daughter fell,
The Phrygian Niobe : high on the top
Of towering Sipylus, the rock enfolds her,
Ev'n as the ivy twines her tendrils round 765
The lofty oak : there still (as Fame reports)
To melting showers and everlasting snow
Obvious she stands, her beauteous bosom wet
With tears, that from her ever-streaming eyes
Incessant flow ; her fate resembles mine. 770

CHO. A goddess she, and from a goddess sprung :
We are but mortal, and of mortals born.
To meet the fate of gods thus in thy life,
And in thy death, O ! 'tis a glorious doom.

ANT. Alas ! thou mock'st me. Why, while yet I
live, 775

Wouldst thou afflict me with reproach like this ?
O my dear country, and my dearer friends,
Its bless'd inhabitants, renowned Thebes !
And ye, Dircæan fountains ! you I call
To witness that I die by laws unjust ; - 780
To my deep prison unlamented go,
To my sad tomb, no fellow-sufferer there •
To sooth my woes, the living or the dead.

CHO. Rashness like thine must meet with such re-
ward :

A father's crimes, I fear, lie heavy on thee. 785

ANT. O, thou hast touched my worst of miseries !
My father's fate, the woes of all our house,
The wretched race of Labdacus, renown'd
For its misfortunes ! O, the guilty bed

Of those from whom I sprang ! unhappy offspring
Of parents most unhappy ! Lo ! to them 791

I go accursed ; a virgin and a slave.

O my poor brother ! most unfortunate

Were thy sad nuptials ; they have slain thy sister.

CHO. Thy piety demands our praise ; but know,
Authority is not to be despised : 796

'Twas thy own rashness brought destruction on thee.

ANT. Thus friendless, unlamented must I tread
The destined path, no longer to behold
Your sacred light, and none shall mourn my fate. 800

Enter CREON.

CRE. Know ye not, slaves like her to death de-
voted

Would never cease their wailings ! Wherefore is it
You thus delay to execute my orders ?

Let her be carried instant to the cave,
And leave her there alone, to live, or die. 805

Her blood rests not on us ; but she no longer
Shall breathe on earth. [*Exit Creon.*

ANT. O dreadful marriage-bed !

O my deep dungeon ! my eternal home,
Whither I go to join my kindred dead !
For not a few hath fell Persephone 810

Already taken ; to her I go, the last
And most unhappy, ere my time was come ;

But still I have sweet hope I shall not go
Unwelcome to my father ; nor to thee,

My mother. Dear to thee, Eteocles, 815
Still shall I ever be : these pious hands

Wash'd your pale bodies, and adorn'd you both
With rites sepulchral, and libations due.

And thus, my Polynices ! for my care
Of thee am I rewarded ; and the good 820

794 Polynices married the daughter of Adrastus, who, in defence of his son-in-law, led his Argians against Thebes : thus his marriage was the cause of his death, and the decree against Antigone consequent on it.

SOPH.—Q

Alone shall praise me. For a husband dead,
 Nor, had I been a mother, for my children,
 Would I have dared to violate the laws :
 Another husband and another child
 Might sooth affliction ; but, my parents dead, 825
 A brother's loss could never be repair'd ;
 And therefore did I dare the venturous deed,
 And therefore die by Creon's dread command.
 Ne'er shall I taste of Hymen's joys, or know
 A mother's pleasures in her infant race ; 830
 But, friendless and forlorn, alive descend
 Into the dreary mansions of the dead.
 And how have I offended the just gods ?
 But wherefore call on them ? Will they protect
 me,
 When thus I meet with the reward of ill 835
 For doing good ? If this be just, ye gods !
 If I am guilty, let me suffer for it :
 But if the crime be theirs, O ! let them feel
 That weight of misery they have laid on me !
 CHO. The storm continues, and her angry soul
 Still pours its sorrows forth. 841

Enter CREON.

CRE. The slaves shall suffer
 For this delay.
 ANT. Alas ! death cannot be
 Far from that voice.
 CRE. I would not have thee hope
 A moment's respite.
 ANT. O my country's gods !
 And thou, my native Thebes ! I leave you now. 845
 Look on me, princes ; see the last of all
 My royal race ; see what I suffer ; see
 From whom I bear it ;—from the worst of men,
 Only because I did delight in virtue. [*Exit Creon.*]

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

Remember what fair Danae endured, 850
 Condemned to change heaven's cheerful light
 For scenes of horror and of night,
 Within a brazen tower long time immured :
 Yet was the maid of noblest race,
 And honour'd ev'n with Joves embrace. 855
 But, O ! when fate decrees a mortal's wo,
 Naught can reverse the doom, or stop the blow,
 Nor heaven above, nor earth and seas below.

ANTISTROPHE I.

The Thracian monarch, Dryas' hapless son,
 Chain'd to a rock, in torment lay, 860
 And breathed his angry soul away,
 By wrath misguided, and by pride undone ;
 Taught by the offended god to know
 From foul reproach what evils flow :
 For he the rites profaned with slanderous tongue ;
 The holy flame he quench'd, disturb'd the song, 866
 And waked to wrath the Muses' tuneful throng.

STROPHE II.

His turbid waves, where Salmydessus roll'd
 And proud Cyanea's rocks divide the flood, 869
 There from thy temple, Mars ! didst thou behold
 The sons of Phineus weltering in their blood.

850 Acrisius, king of the Argives, having been warned by an oracle that he should be slain by his grandson, shut up his daughter Danae in a brazen tower ; Jupiter, however, according to the poets, gained access to her, by transforming himself into a golden shower.

859 Lycurgus, king of Thrace, for contemning or disturbing the rites of Bacchus, was chained to a rock, where he perished.

866 Salmydessus was a river in Thrace, near which was a temple dedicated to Mars. The Cyaneæ were two rocks, or small islands, near the Thracian Bosphorus.

871 Plexippus and Pandion, whose eyes were put out by their stepmother Idæa, the wife of Phineus, after the death of their own mother Cleopatra, the daughter of Boreas and Orithyia, whose fate is alluded to in the latter part of the ode.

A mother did the cruel deed ;
 A mother bade her children bleed :
 Both, by her impious hand deprived of light,
 In vain lamented long their ravish'd sight, 875
 And closed their eyes in never-ending night.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Long time they wept a better mother's fate,
 Unhappy offspring of a luckless bed !
 Yet nobly born, and eminently great
 Was she, and 'mid sequester'd caverns bred ; 880
 Her father's angry storms among,
 Daughter of gods, from Boreas sprung.
 Equal in swiftness to the bounding steed,
 She skimm'd the mountains with a courser's speed ;
 Yet was the nymph to death and misery decreed.
 [Exeunt.]

ACT IV.

TIRESIAS, GUIDE, CREON, CHORUS.

TIR. Princes of Thebes ! behold, conducted hither
 By my gentle guide (such is the blind man's fate),
 Tiresias comes.

CRE. O venerable prophet !
 What hast thou to impart ?

TIR. I will inform thee :
 Observe, and be obedient.

CRE. Have I not 890
 Been ever so ?

TIR. Thou hast ; and therefore Thebes
 Hath flourish'd still—

CRE. By thy protecting hand.

TIR. Therefore be wise ; for know, this very hour
 Is the important crisis of thy fate.

886 The name of princes among the Greeks was given, not only to sovereigns, but frequently to the principal and most honourable members of the commonwealth. Tiresias, we see, compliments the ancient citizens of Thebes, who composed the chorus, with this title.

CÆ. Speak, then, what is it? How I dread thy words!

TIR. When thou hast heard the portents which my art

But now discover'd, thou wilt see it all.

Know, then, that sitting on my ancient throne

Augurial, whence each divination comes,

Sudden a strange unusual noise was heard 900

Of birds, whose loud and barbarous dissonance

I knew not how to interpret: by the sound

Of clashing wings, I could discover well

That with their bloody claws they tore each other.

Amazed and fearful, instantly I tried, 905

On burning altars holy sacrifice;

When, from the victim, lo! the sullen flame

Aspired not; smother'd in the ashes, still

Laid the moist flesh, and, roll'd in smoke, repell'd

The rising fire; while from their fat the thighs 910

Were separate: all these signs of deadly omen,

Boding dark vengeance, did I learn from him.

[pointing to the guide.]

He is my leader, king! and I am thine.

Then mark me well; from thee these evils flow;

From thy unjust decree; our altars all 915

Have been polluted by the unhallow'd food

Of birds and dogs, that prey'd upon the corse

Of wretched Œdipus' unhappy son;

Nor will the gods accept our offer'd prayers,

Or from our hands receive the sacrifice: 920

No longer will the birds send forth their sounds

Auspicious, fatten'd thus with human blood.

Consider this, my son! and, O! remember,

To err is human; 'tis the common lot

Of frail mortality: and he alone 925

Is wise and happy, who, when ills are done,

Persists not, but would heal the wound he made;

But self-sufficient obstinacy ever

Is folly's utmost height. Where is the glory

To slay the slain, or persecute the dead? 930

I wish thee well, and therefore have spoke thus:
When those who love advise, 'tis sweet to learn.

CRE. I know, old man, I am the general mark,
The butt of all, and you all aim at me :
For me, I know, your prophecies were made, 935
And I am sold to this detested race ;
Betray'd to them. But make your gains ; go, purchase

Your Sardinian amber, and your Indian gold ;
They shall not buy a tomb for Polynices :
No, should the eagle seek him for his food, 940
And, towering, bear him to the throne of Jove,
I would not bury him ; for well I know,
The gods by mortals cannot be polluted ;
But the best men, by sordid gain corrupt,
Say all that's ill, and fall beneath the lowest. 945

TIR. Who knows this, or who dare accuse us
of it ?

CRE. What mean'st thou by that question ? Ask'st
thou who ?

TIR. How far is wisdom beyond every good ?

CRE. As far as folly beyond every ill.

TIR. That's a distemper thou'rt afflicted with. 950

CRE. I'll not revile a prophet.

TIR. But thou dost ;

Thou'lt not believe.

CRE. Your prophetic race
Are lovers all of gold.

TIR. Tyrants are so,
Howe'er ill gotten.

CRE. Know'st thou 'tis a king
Thou'rt talking thus to ?

TIR. Yes, I know it well ; 955
A king, who owes to me his country's safety.

CRE. Thou'rt a wise prophet, but thou art unjust.

TIR. Thou wilt oblige me then to utter that
Which I had purposed to conceal.

CRE. Speak out ;
Say what thou wilt, but say it not for hire. 960

TIR. Thus may it seem to thee.

CRE. But know, old man,
I am not to be sold.

TIR. Remember this :
Not many days shall the bright sun perform
His stated course, ere, sprung from thy own loins,
Thyself shall yield a victim : in thy turn, 965
Thou too shalt weep, for that thy cruel sentence
Decreed a guiltless virgin to the tomb,
And kept on earth, unmindful of the gods,
Ungraced, unburied, an unhallow'd corse
Which not to thee, nor to the gods above 970
Of right belonged ; 'twas arbitrary power.
But the avenging Furies lie conceal'd ;
The ministers of death have spread the snare,
And with like woes await to punish thee.
Do I say this from hopes of promised gold ? 975
Pass but little time, and thou shalt hear
The shrieks of men ; the women's loud laments,
O'er all thy palace ; see the offended people
Together rage ; thy cities all by dogs
And beasts and birds polluted, and the stench 980
Of filth obscene on every altar laid.
Thus from my angry soul have I sent forth
Its keenest arrows (for thou hast provoked me) ;
Nor shall they fly in vain, or thou escape
The destined blow. Now, boy, conduct me home :
On younger heads the tempest of his rage 986
Shall fall ; but, henceforth, let him learn to speak
In humbler terms, and bear a better mind.

[*Exit Tiresias.*]

CHO. He's gone, and dreadful were his prophe-
cies : 989
Since these gray hairs were o'er my temple spread,
Naught from these lips hath flow'd but sacred truth.

970 The heathen deities were divided into the gods above, and the gods below ; to the latter of these belonged the care of the dead, whom Creon had offended by refusing burial to the corpse of Polynices.

CRE. I know there hath not, and am troubled
much

For the event : 'tis grating to submit ;
And yet the mind, spite of itself, must yield
In such distress.

CHO. Son of Menœceus ! now 995
Thou need'st most counsel.

CRE. What wouldst thou advise !
I will obey thee.

CHO. Set the virgin free,
And let a tomb be raised for Polynices.

CRE. And dost thou counsel thus ? and must I yield ?

CHO. Immediately, O king ! for vengeance falls
With hasty footsteps on the guilty head. 1001

CRE. I cannot, yet I must reverse the sentence :
There is no struggling with necessity.

CHO. Do it thyself, nor trust another hand.

CRE. I will ; and you, my servants, be prepared ;
Each with his axe quick hasten to the place. 1006
Myself (for thus I have resolved) will go,
And the same hand that bound shall set her free ;
For, O ! I fear 'tis wisest still through life
To keep our ancient laws, and follow virtue. 1010

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

Bacchus, by various names to mortals known,
Fair Semele's illustrious son !
Offspring of thunder-bearing Jove,
Who honor'st famed Italia with thy love !
Who dwell'st where erst the dragon's teeth were
strow'd, 1015
Or where Ismenus pours his gentle flood ;
Who dost o'er Ceres' hallow'd rites preside,
And at thy native Thebes propitious still reside.

ANTISTROPHE I.

Where famed Parnassus' forked hills uprising,
To thee ascends the sacrifice ; 1020

Corycia's nymphs attend below,
While from Castalia's fount fresh waters flow :
O'er Nysa's mountains wreaths of ivy twine,
And mix their tendrils with the clustering vine :
Around their master crowd the virgin throng, 1025
And praise the god of Thebes in never-dying song.

STROPHE II.

Happiest of cities, Thebes ! above the rest
By Semele and Bacchus bless'd !
O ! visit now thy once beloved abode !
O ! heal our woes, thou kind, protecting god ! 1030
From steep Parnassus, or the Eubæan sea,
With smiles auspicious come, and bring with thee
Health, joy, and peace, and fair prosperity.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Immortal leader of the maddening choir,
Whose torches blaze with unextinguish'd fire ! 1035
Great son of Jove, who guid'st the tuneful throng,
Thou, who presidest o'er the nightly song,
Come with thy Naxian maids, a festive train,
Who, wild with joy, and raging o'er the plain, 1039
For thee the dance prepare, to thee devote the strain.
[*Exeunt.*]

ACT V.

MESSENGER, CHORUS.

MES. Ye race of Cadmus, sons of ancient Thebes,
Henceforth no state of human life by me
Shall be or valued or despised ; for all

1021 The Muses, so called from Corycium, at the foot of Mount Parnassus.

1023 Parnassus is described by the poets as having two tops ; one called Cirrha, sacred to Apollo ; the other Nysa, sacred to Bacchus ; there was also a city in Arcadia of this name, where Bacchus was nursed.

1038 Naxos was one of the Cyclades, islands in the Archipelago, famous for its vines : of the nymphs of Naxos, it is reported, that they ran wild and frantic about the woods, with each a torch, or thyrsus, in her hand, singing the praises of Bacchus.

Depends on fortune : she exalts the low,
 And casts the mighty down : the fate of men 1045
 Can never be foretold. There was a time,
 When Creon lived in envied happiness ;
 Ruled o'er renowned Thebes, which from her foes
 He had deliver'd, with successful power :
 Bless'd in his kingdom, in his children bless'd, 1050
 He stretch'd o'er all his universal sway :—
 Now all is gone : when pleasure is no more
 Man then is but an animated corse,
 Nor can be said to live : he may be rich,
 Or deck'd with regal honours : but if joy 1055
 Be absent from him, if he tastes them not,
 'Tis useless grandeur all, and empty shade.

CHO. Touching our royal master, bring'st thou
 news
 Of sorrow to us !

MES. They are dead ; and those
 Who live, the dreadful cause.

CHO. Quick, tell us who 1060
 The slayer and the slain.

MES. Hæmon is dead.

CHO. Dead ! by what hand, his father's or his own !

MES. Enraged, and grieving for his murder'd love,
 He slew himself !

CHO. O prophet ! thy predictions
 Were but too true.

MES. Since thus it be, 'tis fit 1065
 We should consult : our present state demands it.

CHO. But see, Eurydice, the wretched wife
 Of Creon, comes this way : or chance hath brought her,
 Or Hæmon's hapless fate hath reach'd her ear.

Enter EURYDICE.

EUR. O citizens ! as to Minerva's fane 1070
 Ev'n now I went to pay my vows, the doors
 I burst, and heard imperfectly the sound
 Of most disastrous news, which touch'd me near :
 Breathless I fell amid the virgin throng,

And now I come to know the dreadful truth. 1075
Whate'er it be, I'll hear it now ; for, O !
I am no stranger to calamity.

MES. Then mark, my mistress ! I will tell thee all,
Nor will I pass a circumstance unmention'd.

Should I deceive thee with an idle tale, 1080
'Twere soon discover'd ; truth is always best :

Know, then, I follow'd Creon to the field,
Where, torn by dogs, the wretched carcass lay
Of Polynices ; first to Proserpine

And angry Pluto, to appease their wrath, 1085
Our humble prayers addressing, there we laved

In the pure stream the body ; then with leaves
Fresh gather'd covering, burned his poor remains,
And on the neighbouring turf a tomb upraised ;

Then towards the virgin's rocky cave advanced, 1090
When, from the dreadful chamber a sad cry,

As from afar, was heard : a servant ran
To tell the king ; and still, as we approach'd,

The sound of sorrow, from a voice unknown
And undistinguish'd, issued forth. " Alas !" 1095

Said Creon, " am I then a faithful prophet ?

And do I tread a more unhappy path
Than e'er I went before ? It is my son ;

I know his voice : but get ye to the door,
My servants, close ; look through the stony heap ;

Mark if it be so. Is it Hæmon's voice ?" 1101
Again he cried ; " or have the gods deceived me ?"

Thus spoke the king : we, to our mournful lord
Obedient, look'd, and saw Antigone

Down in the deepest hollow of the cave 1105
By her own vestments hung ; close by her side

The wretched youth, embracing in his arms
Her lifeless corse, weeping his father's crime,

His ravish'd bride, and horrid nuptial bed.
Creon beheld, and loud, approaching, cried ;— 1110

" What art thou doing ? What's thy dreadful purpose ?
What means my son ? come forth, my Hæmon, come ;

Thy father begs thee." With indignant eye,

The youth look'd up, nor scornful deign'd an answer;
 But silent drew his sword, and with fell rage 1115
 Struck at his father, who by flight escaped
 The blow; then on himself bent all his wrath:
 Full in his side the weapon fix'd; but still,
 While life remain'd, on the soft bosom hung
 Of the dear maid, and his last spirit breathed 1120
 O'er her pale cheek, discolor'd with his blood.
 Thus lie the wretched pair, in death united,
 And celebrate their nuptials in the tomb;
 To future times a terrible example
 Of the sad woes which rashness ever brings. 1125

[*Exit Eurydice.*]

CHO. What can this mean? She's gone; without
 a word.

MES. 'Tis strange! and yet I trust she will not
 loud
 Proclaim her griefs to all; but (for I know
 She's ever prudent), with her virgin train,
 In secret weep her murder'd Hæmon's fate. 1130

CHO. Clamour, indeed were vain; but such deep
 silence

Doth ever threaten horrid consequence.

MES. Within we soon shall know, if aught she
 hide

Of deadly purport in her angry soul: 1134
 For well thou say'st her silence is most dreadful.

[*Exit Messenger.*]

CHO. But, lo! the king himself; and in his arms
 See his dead son, the monument accursed
 Of his sad fate, which, may we say unblamed,
 Sprang not from other's guilt, but from his own.

Enter CREON, bearing the body of Hæmon.

CRE. Ah me! what deadly woes from the bad
 mind 1140
 Perpetual flow! thus in one wretched house
 Have you beheld the slayer and the slain.
 O fatal counsels! O unhappy son!

Thus with thy youthful bride to sink in death !
Thou diest, my child ; and I alone have killed thee !

CHO. O king ! thy justice comes too late.

CRE.

It doth : 1146

I know it well, unhappy as I am :

For, O ! the god this heavy weight of wo

Hath cast upon me, and his fiercest wrath

Torments me now, changing my joyful state 1150

To keenest anguish. O ! the fruitless toils

Of wretched mortals !

Enter MESSENGER.

MES. Thus oppress'd, my lord,
With bitterest misfortune, more affliction
Awaits thee still, which thou wilt find within.

CRE. And can there be more woes ? Is aught to
come 1155

More horrible than this ?

MES. The queen is dead,
Her wounds yet fresh : eager, alas ! to show
A mother's love, she follow'd her lost child.

CRE. O Death insatiate ! how dost thou afflict me !
What cruel news, thou messenger of ill ! 1160
Hast thou brought now ?

CHO. A wretch already dead
With grief, thy horrid tale once more hath slain.

CRE. Didst thou not say a fresh calamity
Had fallen upon me ? Didst not say my wife
Was dead, alas ! for grief of Hæmon's fate ? 1165

[Scene opens, and discovers the body of Eurydice.]

MES. Behold her there.

CRE. O me ! another blow !
What now remains ? What can I suffer more,
Thus bearing in these arms my breathless son ?
My wife too dead ! O most unhappy mother !
And O, thou wretched child !

MES. Close by the altar 1170
She drew the sword, and closed her eyes in death,

SOPE.—R

Lamenting first her lost Megareus' fate
 And Hæmon's death, with imprecations dire
 Still poured on thee, the murderer of thy son.

CRE. I shudder at it. Will no friendly hand 1175
 Destroy me quick ? for, O ! I am most wretched ;
 Beset with miseries !

MES. She accused thee oft,
 And said the guilt of both their deaths was thine.

CRE. Alas ! I only am to blame ; 'twas I
 Who kill'd thee, Hæmon ! I confess my crime. 1180
 Bear me, my servants ! bear me far from hence,
 For I am—nothing.

CHO. If in ills like these
 Aught can be well, thou hast determined right :
 When least we see our woes, we feel them least.

CRE. Quick let my last, my happiest hour appear :
 Would it were come, the period of my woes ! 1186
 O that I might not see another day !

CHO. Time must determine that : the present hour
 Demands our care ; the rest be left to Heaven.

CRE. But I have wish'd and pray'd for 't.

CHO. Pray for nothing ; 1190
 There's no reversing the decrees of fate.

CRE. Take hence this useless load, this guilty
 wretch

Who slew his child, who slew ev'n thee, my wife !
 I know not whither to betake me, where
 To turn my eyes ; for all is dreadful round me, 1195
 And fate hath weighed me down on every side.

CHO. Wisdom alone is man's true happiness.
 We are not to dispute the will of heaven ;
 For ever are the boastings of the proud
 By the just gods repaid, and man at last 1200
 Is taught to fear their anger and be wise.

1172 Megareus was the first husband of Eurydice.

TRACHINIÆ.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

HERCULES.

HYLLUS, his son.

DEJANIRA, wife of Hercules.

LICHAS, a herald.

ATTENDANT on Dejanira.

NURSE.

OLD MAN.

MESSENGER.

CHORUS, composed of virgins of Trachis.

TRACHINIÆ.

ARGUMENT.

IOLÉ, the daughter of Eurytus, king of Œchalia, was sought in marriage by Hercules, who, in revenge for the rejection of his addresses, killed her brother Iphitus. Hercules shortly after became a successful suitor of Dejanira, and married her. Being compelled to seek a temporary shelter in Trachis, he committed the custody of his wife to Ceyx, the king of that country, and made an incursion into Œchalia. Iole now fell into the hands of her former lover, whose affection met with reciprocal tenderness; and Dejanira, secretly informed of her husband's attachment to her more fortunate rival, sent, by the hands of Lichas, a poisoned tunic, which she had formerly received as a philtre from the centaur Nessus, when expiring; and which he then told her had the power of recalling an inconstant man from the temptations of unlawful love. The unfortunate hero, attired in this fatal garment, soon became sensible of his approaching end; and in his rage threw Lichas into the sea; after which he directed his son Hyllus to convey him immediately to Mount Œta, and to burn him on a funeral pile to be there erected; while Dejanira, in despair for the mischief she had caused, destroyed herself.

ACT I.

Scene before the palace of Ceyx, in Trachis.

DEJANIRA, ATTENDANT.

DEJ. OF ancient fame, and long for truth received,
Hath been the maxim, that nor good nor ill
Can mortal life be called before we die.
Alas! it is not so; for, O my friends!

R 2

Ere to the shades of Orcus I descend, 5
 Too well I know that Dejanira's life
 Hath ever been, and ever must be wretched.
 While, in my native Pleuron, Ceneus watch'd
 My tender years with kind, paternal care,
 If ever woman suffer'd from the dread 10
 Of hated nuptials, I endured the worst
 And bitterest woes, when Achelous came,
 The river-god, to ask a father's voice,
 And snatched me to his arms. With triple form
 He came affrighting; now, to sight appear'd 15
 A bull; and now, with motley scales adorn'd,
 A wreathed serpent; now with human shape
 And bestial head united: from his beard,
 Shadow'd with hair, as from a fountain dripp'd
 The overflowing water; horrid form! 20
 This to escape, my prayers incessant rose,
 That I might rather die than e'er approach
 His hated bed; when, lo! the welcome hour,
 Though late, arriv'd that brought the son of Jove
 And fair Alcmena to my aid: he came, 25
 He fought, he freed me. How the battle pass'd,
 Who unconcern'd beheld it best can tell;
 Alas! I saw it not, oppress'd with fear.
 Lest from my fatal beauty should arise
 Some sad event: at length, deciding Jove 30
 Gave to the doubtful fight a happy end,
 If I may call it so; for, since the hour
 That gave me to Alcides' wish'd-for bed,
 Fears rise on fears; still is my anxious heart
 Solicitous for him: oft-times the night, 35
 Which brings him to me, bears him from my arms
 To other labours, and a second toil.
 Our children, too, alas! he sees them not,

8 A city of Ætolia, and the residence of Ceneus, king of that country, and father of Dejanira.

12 A famous river, arising out of Mount Pindus, and dividing Ætolia from Acarnania. The fabulous account of his person and powers is received by the ancient poets, and explained by the mythologists.

But as the husbandman, who ne'er beholds
 His distant lands, save at the needful time 40
 Of seed or harvest. Wandering thus, and thus
 Returning ever, is he sent to serve
 I know not whom : when crown'd with victory,
 Then most my fears prevail ; for since he slew
 The valiant Iphitus, at Trachis here 45
 We live in exile with our generous friend,
 The hospitable Ceyx ; he, meantime,
 Is gone, and none can tell me where : he went,
 And left me most unhappy. O ! some ill
 Hath sure befallen him ! for no little time 50
 Hath he been absent : 'tis full fifteen moons
 Since I beheld him, and no messenger
 Is come to Dejanira : some misfortune
 Doubtless hath happen'd, for he left behind
 A dreadful scroll. O ! I have pray'd the gods 55
 A thousand times it may contain no ill.

ATT. My royal mistress, long have I beheld
 Thy tears and sorrows for thy lost Alcides ;
 But if the counsels of a slave might claim
 Attention, I would speak, would ask thee wherefore,
 Among thy sons, a numerous progeny, 61
 None hath been sent in search of him, and chief
 Thy Hyllus, if he holds a father's health
 And safety dear : but, ev'n as we could wish,
 Behold him here : if what I have advised 65
 Seem fitting, he is come in happiest hour
 To execute our purpose.

Enter HYLLUS.

DEJ. O, my son !
 Oft from the meanest tongue the words of truth
 And safety flow : this woman, though a slave, 69
 Hath spoke what would have well become the mouth
 Of freedom's self to utter.

45 Iphitus was the son of Eurytus, king of Œchalia, and was slain by Hercules ; who, as an expiation for the crime, submitted to a voluntary exile at Trachis, under the protection of Ceyx, the king of that country.

HYL. May I know
What she hath said ?

DEJ. She says, it doth reflect
Disgrace on thee, thy father so long absent,
Not to have gain'd some knowledge of his fate.

HYL. I have already, if I may rely 75
On what report hath said of him.

DEJ. O ! where,
Where is he then, my son ?

HYL. These twelve months past,
If fame say true, a Lydian woman held him
In shameful servitude.

DEJ. If it be so,
May every tongue reproach him !

HYL. But I hear 80
He now is free.

DEJ. And where doth rumour say
He is ? Alive or dead ?

HYL. 'Tis said, he leads,
Or means to lead, his forces towards Eubœa,
The land of Eurytus.

DEJ. Alas, my son !
Dost thou not know the oracles he left 85
Touching that kingdom ?

HYL. No, I know not of them :
What were they ?

DEJ. There, he said, or he should die,
Or if he should survive, his life to come
Would all be happy. Wilt thou not, my son !
In this important crisis, strive to aid 90
Thy father ! If he lives, we too shall live
In safety ; if he dies, we perish with him.

HYL. Mother ! I go : long since I had been there,
But that the oracle did never reach
Mine ears before ; meantime, that happy fate, 95
Which on my father ever wont to smile
Propitious, should not suffer us to fear.
Thus far informed, I will not let the means
Of truth escape me, but will know it all.

DEJ. Haste then away, my son, and know, good
deeds, 100
Though late perform'd, are crown'd with sure suc-
cess. [Exit HYLLUS.

Enter CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

On thee we call, great god of day!
To whom the night, with all her starry train,
Yields her solitary reign,
To send us some propitious ray : 105
Say thou, whose all-beholding eye
Doth nature's every part descry,
What dangerous ocean, or what land unknown
From Dejanira keeps Alcmena's valiant son ?

ANTISTROPHE I.

For she nor joy nor comfort knows, 110
But weeps her absent lord, and vainly tries
To close her ever-streaming eyes,
Or sooth her sorrows to repose :
Like the sad bird of night, alone
She makes her solitary moan ; 115
And still, as on her widow'd bed reclined
She lies, unnumber'd fears perplex her anxious mind.

STROPHE II.

Ev'n as the troubled billows roar,
When angry Boreas rules the inclement skies,
And waves on waves tumultuous rise 120
To lash the Cretan shore ;—
Thus, sorrows still on sorrows press'd,
Fill the great Alcides' breast.
Unfading yet shall his fair virtues bloom,
And some protecting god preserve him from the
tomb. 125

ANTISTROPHE II.

Wherefore, to better thoughts inclined,
Let us with hope's fair prospect fill thy breast,
Calm thy anxious thoughts to rest,
And ease thy troubled mind.

No bliss on man unmix'd with wo, 130
 Doth Jove, great lord of all, bestow;
 But good with ill, and pleasure still with pain,
 Like heaven's revolving signs alternate reign.

EPODE.

Not always do the shades of night remain,
 Nor ever with hard fate is man oppress'd; 135
 The wealth that leaves us may return again;
 Sorrow and joy successive fill the breast:
 Fearless then of every ill,
 Let cheerful hope support thee still.

Remember, queen! there is a power above; 140
 And when did the great father, careful Jove,
 Forget his children dear, and kind paternal love?

DEJ. The fame, it seems, of Dejanira's woes
 Hath reach'd thine ears; but, O! thou little know'st
 What I have suffer'd; thou hast never felt 145
 Sorrows like mine; and long may be the time
 Ere sad experience shall afflict thy soul
 With equal woes! Alas! the youthful maid
 In flowery pastures still exulting feeds,
 Nor feels the scorching sun, the wintry storm, 150
 Or blast of angry winds: secure she leads
 A life of pleasure, void of every care,
 Till to the virgin's happy state succeeds
 The name of wife: then shall her portion come
 Of pain and anguish; then her terrors rise 155
 For husband and for children; then, perchance,
 You too may know what 'tis to be unhappy,
 And judge of my misfortunes by your own.
 Long since, oppress'd by many a bitter wo,
 Oft have I wept; but this transcends them all; 160
 For I will tell thee, when Alcides last
 Forth on his journey went, he left behind
 An ancient scroll. Alas! before that time
 In all his labours he did never use
 To speak as one who thought of death; secure 165
 Always he seem'd of victory: but now
 This writing marks as if he were to die,

The portion but reserved for me, and wills
 His children to divide the inheritance;
 Fixes the time, in fifteen moons, it says, 170
 He should return; that past, or he must perish;
 Or, if he 'scape the fatal hour, thenceforth
 Should lead a life of happiness and joy.
 Thus had the gods, it said, decreed his life
 And toil should end; so from their ancient beech
 Dodona's doves foretold. The appointed hour 176
 Approaches that must bring the event, ev'n now,
 My friends; and therefore nightly do I start
 From my sweet slumbers, struck with deadly fear,
 Lest I should lose the dearest, best of men. 180

CHO. Of better omen be thy words: behold
 A messenger who bears (for on his brow
 I see the laurel crown) some joyful news.

Enter MESSENGER.

MES. I come, my royal mistress, to remove
 Thy fears, and bring the first glad tidings to thee;
 To tell thee that Alcmena's son returns 186
 With life and victory: ev'n now he comes
 To lay before his country's gods the spoils
 Of glorious war.

DEJ. What dost thou say, old man?
 What dost thou tell me?

MES. That thy dear Alcides,
 Thy valiant lord, with his victorious bands, 191
 Will soon attend thee.

DEJ. From our citizens
 Didst thou learn this, or from a stranger's tongue?

MES. The herald Lichas, in yon flowery vale,
 But now reported; and I fled impatient, 195
 Soon as I heard it, that I first might tell thee,
 And be rewarded for the welcome tale.

176 At Dodona, a city of Chaonia in Epirus, was a temple dedicated to Jupiter Dodoneus; and in a grove near it a beech-tree, on which two doves sat and prophesied.

DEJ. But wherefore tarries Lichas if he bring
Glad tidings to me ?

MES. 'Tis impossible
To reach thee, for the Melian people throng 200
Around him ; not a man but longs to know
Some news of thy Alcides, stops his journey,
Nor will release him till he hear it all :
Spite of himself, he waits to satisfy
Their eager doubts ; but thou wilt see him soon. 205

DEJ. O, thou, who dwell'st on Ceta's sacred top !
Immortal Jove ! at length, though late, thou givest
The wish'd-for boon : let every female now—
You that within the palace do reside,
And you, my followers here, with shouts proclaim
The bless'd event : for, lo ! a beam of joy 211
I little hoped, breaks forth, and we are happy.

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

Quick let sounds of mirth and joy
Every cheerful hour employ :
Haste, and join the festive song, 215
You who lead the youthful throng ;
On whom the smiles of prosperous fate,
And Hymen's promised pleasures wait.
Now all your Io Pæans sing,
To Phœbus, your protector and your king. 220

ANTISTROPHE.

And you, ye virgin train, attend,
Not unmindful of your friend,
His sister huntress of the groves,
Who still her native Delos loves.
.. Prepare the dance and choral lays, 225
To hymn the chaste Diana's praise ;
To her and her attendant choir
Of mountain nymphs, attune the votive lyre.

EPODE.

Already hath the god possess'd
My soul, and rules the sovereign of my breast. 230

Evæ, Bacchus! lo! I come to join
 Thy throng; around me doth the thyrsus twine,
 And I am fill'd with rage divine.
 See! the glad messenger appears,
 To calm thy doubts, and to remove thy fears. 235
 Let us our Io Pæans sing
 To Phœbus, our protector and our king. [*Exeunt.*

ACT II.

DEJANIRA, CHORUS.

DEJ. THESE eyes deceive me, friends, or I behold
 A crowd approach this way, and with them comes
 The herald Lichas: let me welcome him, 240
 If he bring joyful news.

Enter LICHAS, IOLE, SLAVES.

LI. My royal mistress,
 We greet thee with fair tidings of success,
 And therefore shall our words deserve thy praise.

DEJ. O thou dear messenger! inform me first
 What first I wish to know: my loved Alcides,— 246
 Doth he yet live? Shall I again behold him?

LI. I left him well; in health and manly strength
 Exulting.

DEJ. Where? In his own native land,
 Or 'mid barbarians?

LI. On Eubœa's shore
 He waits, with various fruits to crown the altar,
 And pay due honours to Censæan Jove. 251

DEJ. Commanded by some oracle divine
 Performs he this, or means but to fulfil
 A vow of gratitude for conquest gain'd?

LI. For victory o'er the land, whence we have
 brought 255
 These captive women, whom thou seest before
 thee.

251 So called from Censum, a promontory in Eubœa, where
 altars were raised to Jupiter, and sacrifice offered up to him.

SOPH.—S

DEJ. Whence come the wretched slaves ? for, if
I judge

Their state aright, they must indeed be wretched.

LI. Know, when Alcides had laid waste the city
Of Eurytus, to him and to the gods 260
Were these devoted.

DEJ. In Œchalia, then,
Hath my Alcides been this long, long time ?

LI. Not so : in Lydia (as himself reports)
Was he detain'd a slave ; so Jove ordain'd,
And who shall blame the high decrees of Jove ? 265
Sold to barbarian Omphale, he served
Twelve tedious months : ill-brook'd he the foul
shame ;

Then in his wrath he made a solemn vow
He would revenge the wrong on the base author,
And bind in chains his wife and all his race ; 270
Nor fruitless the resolve ; for when the year
Of slavery past had expiated the crime
Imputed, soon with gather'd force he march'd
'Gainst the devoted Eurytus, the cause
(For so he deem'd him) of those hateful bonds. 275
Within his palace he had erst received
Alcides, but with bitterest taunts reviled him,
Boasting, in spite of his all-conquering arrows,
His son's superior skill ; and said, a slave 279
Like him should bend beneath a freeman's power :
Then, 'mid the banquet's mirth, inflamed with
wine,

Cast forth his ancient guest. This to revenge,
When Iphitus to search his pastured steeds
Came to Tirynthia, Hercules surprised ;
And, as he turn'd his wandering eyes aside, 285
Hurl'd headlong from the mountain's top. Great
Jove,

Father of men, from high Olympus saw
And disapproved the deed, unworthy of him,

286 A queen of Lydia.

Who ne'er before by fraud destroy'd his foes.
 With open force had he revenged the wrong, 290
 Jove had forgiven; but violence conceal'd
 The gods abhor, and therefore was he sold
 To slavery; Eurytus' unhappy sons
 Were punish'd too, and dwell in Erebus;
 Their city is destroyed; and they, whom here 295
 Thou seest, from freedom and prosperity
 Reduced to wretchedness: to thee they come,
 Such was Alcides' will; which I, his slave,
 Have faithfully perform'd. Himself, ere long,
 Thou shalt behold, when to paternal Jove 300
 He hath fulfilled his vows. Thus my long tale
 Ends with the welcomest news which thou couldst
 hear:

Alcides comes!

CHO. O queen! thy happiness
 Is great indeed, to see these slaves before thee,
 And know thy lord approaches.

DEJ. I am happy: 305
 To see my Hercules with victory crown'd,
 'Tis fit I should rejoice; and yet, my friends
 If we consider well, we still should fear
 For the successful, lest they fall from bliss.
 It moves my pity much when I behold 310
 These wretched captives in a foreign land,
 Without a parent, and without a home,
 Thus doom'd to slavery here, who once, perhaps,
 Enjoy'd fair freedom's best inheritance.
 O Jove! averter of each mortal ill! 315
 Let not my children ever feel thy arm
 Thus raised against them; or, if 'tis decreed,
 Let it not be while Dejanira lives.
 The sight of these alarms my fears; but tell me,
 Thou poor afflicted captive, who thou art. [to Iole.
 Art thou a mother? or, as by thy years 321
 Thou seem'st, a virgin, and of noble birth?
 Canst thou not tell me, Lichas, whence she sprang?
 Inform me; for, of all these slaves, she most

Hath won my pity ; and in her alone 326
 Have I observed a firm and generous mind.

LI. Why ask of me ? I know not who she is ;
 Perhaps of no mean rank.

DEJ. The royal race
 Of Eurytus ?

LI. I know not, nor did e'er
 Inquire.

DEJ. And didst thou never hear her name 330
 From her companions ?

LI. Never : I perform'd
 My work in silence.

DEJ. Tell me then thyself,
 Thou wretched maid ! for I am most unhappy
 Till I know who thou art.

LI. She will not speak ;
 I know she will not : not a word hath pass'd 335
 Her lips e'er since she left her native land ;
 But still in tears the hapless virgin mourns
 The burden of her sad calamity.
 Her fate is hard : she merits your forgiveness.

DEJ. Let her go in ; I'll not disturb her peace,
 Nor would I heap fresh sorrows on her head ; 341
 She hath enough already : we'll retire. [*to Iole.*
 Go where thou wilt ; my cares within await me.
[Exeunt Lichas, Iole, and Slaves.

Enter MESSENGER.

MES. Stay thee awhile. I have a tale to tell
 Touching these captives, which imports thee nearly ;
 And I alone am able to inform thee. 346

DEJ. What dost thou know ? and why wouldst
 thou detain me ?

MES. Return, and hear me : when I spake before,
 I did not speak in vain, nor shall I now.

DEJ. Wouldst thou I call them back, or mean'st
 to tell 350

Thy secret purpose here to me alone ?

MES. To these and thee thy friends ; no more.

DEL. They're gone ;
Now speak in safety.

MES. Lichas is dishonest ;
And, either now or when I saw him last,
Hath utter'd falsehood.

DEL. Ha ! what dost thou say ? 355
I understand thee not ; explain it quickly.

MES. I heard him say, before attendant crowds,
It was this virgin, this fair slave, destroyed
Œchalia's lofty towers : 'twas love alone
That waged the war, no Lydian servitude. 360
Nor Omphale, nor the pretended fall
Of Iphitus, for so the tale he brings
Would fain persuade thee. Know, thy own Alcides,
For that he could not gain the assenting voice
Of Eurytus to his unlawful love, 365
Laid waste the city where her father reign'd,
And slew him : now the daughter, as a slave,
Is sent to thee ; the reason is too plain.
Nor think he meant her for a slave alone,—
The maid he loves, that would be strange indeed,
My royal mistress ! most unwillingly 371
Do I report the unwelcome news, but thought
It was my duty ; I have told the truth,
And the Trachinians bear me witness of it.

DEL. Wretch that I am ! to what am I reserved ?
What hidden pestilence within my roof 376
Have I received unknowing ! Hapless woman !
She seem'd of beauteous form and noble birth :
Have you not heard her name ? for Lichas said
He knew it not.

MES. Daughter of Eurytus, 380
Her name Iole ; he had not inquired
Touching her race.

CHO. Perdition on the man,
Of all most wicked, who hath thus deceived thee !

DEL. What's to be done, my friend ? This dread-
ful news
Afflicts me sorely.

CHO. Go, and learn the whole 385
From his own lips ; compel him to declare
The truth.

DEJ. I will ; thou counsell'st me aright.

CHO. Shall we attend you ?

DEJ. No ; for see, he comes
Uncall'd.

Enter LICHAS, ATTENDANT.

LI. O queen ! what are thy last commands
To thy Alcides ! for ev'n now I go 390
To meet him.

DEJ. Hast thou taken so long a journey
To Trachis, and wouldst now so soon return,
Ere I can hold some further converse with thee ?

LI. If thou wouldst question me of aught, behold
me
Ready to tell thee.

DEJ. Wilt thou tell me truth ? 395

LI. In all I know ; so bear me witness, Jove !

DEJ. Who is that woman thou hast brought ?

LI. I hear
She's of Eubœa : for her race and name,
I know them not.

DEJ. Look on me : who am I ?

LI. Why ask me this ?

DEJ. Be bold, and answer me. 400

LI. Daughter of CENEUS, wife of HERCULES ;
If I am not deceived, 'tis DEJANIRA,
My queen, my mistress.

DEJ. Am I so indeed ?
Am I thy mistress ?

LI. Doubtless.

DEJ. Why, 'tis well
Thou dost confess it : then what punishment 405
Wouldst thou deserve, if thou wert faithless to her !

LI. How faithless ! Mean'st thou to betray me ?

DEJ. No ;
The fraud is thine.

LI. 'Twas folly thus to stay
And hear thee: I must hence.

DEJ. Thou shalt not go
Till I have ask'd thee one short question.*

LI. Ask it, 410
For so it seems thou art resolved.

DEJ. Inform me;
This captive—dost thou know her?

LI. I have told thee:
What wouldst thou more?

DEJ. Didst thou not say this slave,
Though now it seems thou know'st her not, was
daughter
Of Eurytus, her name Iole?

LI. Where? 415
To whom did I say this? What witness have you?

DEJ. Assembled multitudes: the citizens
Of Trachis heard thee.

LI. They might say they heard
Reports like these; but must it therefore seem
A truth undoubted?

DEJ. Seem! Didst thou not swear 420
That thou hadst brought this woman to partake
The bed of my Alcides?

LI. Did I say so?
But tell me who this stranger is.

DEJ. The man
Who heard thee say Alcides' love for her,
And not the Lydian, laid the city waste. 425

LI. Let him come forth, and prove it: 'tis no mark
Of wisdom thus to trifle with the unhappy.

DEJ. O! do not, I beseech thee, by that Power
Whose thunders roll o'er Cæta's lofty grove,
Do not conceal the truth. Thou speak'st to one
Not unexperienced in the ways of men; 431
To one who knows we cannot always joy
In the same object: 'tis an idle task
To take up arms against all-powerful love.
Love, which commands the gods, love conquer'd me,

And wherefore should it not subdue another, 436
 Whose nature and whose passions are the same?
 If my Alcides is indeed oppress'd
 With this sad malady, I blame him not;
 That were a folly: nor this hapless maid, 440
 Who meant no ill, no injury to me.
 'Tis not for this I speak; but mark me well:
 If thou wert taught by him to utter falsehood,
 A vile and shameful lesson didst thou learn;
 And if thou art thy own instructor, know, 445
 Thou shalt seem wicked ev'n when most sincere,
 And never be believed: speak then the truth;
 For to be branded with the name of liar
 Is ignominy fit for slaves alone,
 And not for thee. Nor think thou canst conceal it;
 Those who have heard the tale will tell it me. 451
 If fear deter thee, thou hast little cause;
 For to suspect his falsehood is my grief;
 To know it, none: already have I seen
 Alcides' heart estranged to other loves, 455
 Yet did no rival ever hear from me
 One bitter word, nor will I now reproach
 This wretched slave, ev'n though she pines for him
 With strongest love. Alas! I pity her,
 Whose beauty thus has been the fatal cause 460
 Of all her misery; laid her country waste,
 And brought her here, far from her native land,
 A helpless captive: but no more of this;
 Only remember, if thou must be false,
 Be false to others, but be true to me. 465
 Cho. She speaks most kindly to thee; be per-
 suaded;
 Hereafter thou shalt find her not ungrateful.
 We too will thank thee.
 Li. O, my dearest mistress!
 Not unexperienced thou in human life,
 Nor ignorant; and therefore naught from thee 470
 Will I conceal, but tell thee all the truth.
 'Tis as he said; and Hercules, indeed,

Doth love Iole : for her sake alone,
 Œchalia, her unhappy country, fell ;
 This (for 'tis fit I tell thee) he confess'd, 475
 Nor will'd me to conceal it ; but I fear'd
 'Twould pierce thy heart to hear the unwelcome
 tale,

And therefore own I would have kept it from thee.
 That crime, if such it was, I have committed :
 But since thou know'st it all, let me entreat thee,
 For her sake and thy own, O ! do not hate 481
 This wretched captive ; but remember well,
 What thou hast promised faithfully perform.
 He whose victorious arm hath conquered all,
 Now yields to her, and is a slave to love. 485

DEL. 'Tis my resolve to act as thou advisest.
 I'll not resist the gods, nor add fresh weight
 To my calamity : let us go in,
 That thou mayst bear my orders to Alcides,
 And, with them, gifts, in kind return for those 490
 We have received from him. Thou must not hence
 With empty hand, who hither brought'st to me
 Such noble presents, and so fair a train. [*Exeunt.*]

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

Thee, Venus ! gods and men obey,
 And universal is thy sway. 495
 Need I recount the powers subdued by love ?
 Neptune, who shakes the solid ground ;
 The king of Erebus profound ;
 Or the great lord of all, Saturnian Jove ?
 To mortals let the song descend, 500
 To pity our afflicted friend,
 And sooth the injured Dejanira's woes :
 For her the angry rivals came,
 For her they felt an equal flame,
 For her, behold ! the doubtful battle glows. 505

ANTISTROPHE.

In dreadful majesty array'd,
 Affrighting sore the fearful maid,
 Up rose the horned monarch of the flood :
 He, who through fair Ætolia's plain
 Pours his rich tribute to the main ; 510
 A bull's tremendous form belied the god.
 From his own Thebes, to win her love,
 With him the happier son of Jove,
 The great Alcides came, and in his hand
 The club, the bow, and glittering spear ; 515
 While Venus, to her votaries near,
 Waved o'er their heads her all-deciding wand.

EPODE.

Warm, and more warm the conflict grows :
 Dire was the noise of rattling bows,
 Of front to front opposed, and hand to hand : 520
 Deep was the animated strife
 For love, for conquest, and for life ;
 Alternate groans re-echoed through the land :
 While pensive on the distant shore,
 She heard the doubtful battle roar, 525
 Many a sad tear the hapless virgin shed ;
 Far from her tender mother's arms,
 She knows not yet for whom her charms
 She keeps, or who shall share her bridal bed.
[*Exeunt.*]

ACT III.

DEJANIRA, CHORUS.

DEJ. My guest, in pity to the captive train 530
 Laments their woes, and takes his kind farewell :
 Meantime, my friends, in secret came I here
 To pour forth all my miseries, and impart
 To you my inmost thoughts, my last resolve.
 Alas ! within these walls I have received, 535
 Like the poor sailor, an unhappy freight
 To sink me down, no virgin, but a wife,

The wife of my Alcides ; his loved arms
 Now must embrace us both : my faithful lord
 (Faithful and good I thought him) thus rewards 540
 My tender cares, and all the tedious toils
 I suffer'd for him ; but I will be calm ;
 For 'tis an evil I have felt before.

And yet to live with her ! with her to share
 My husband's bed ! what woman could support it ? 545
 Her youth is stealing onward to its prime,
 While mine is wither'd ; and the eye, which longs
 To pluck the opening flower, from the dry leaf
 Will turn aside : her younger charms, I fear,
 Have conquer'd, and henceforth, in name alone 550
 Shall Dejanira be Alcides' wife.

But ill do rage and violence become
 The prudent matron ; therefore, mark me well,
 And hear what I have purposed, to relieve
 My troubled heart. Within a brazen urn, 555
 Conceal'd from every eye, I long have kept
 That ancient gift which Nessus did bequeath me,
 The hoary centaur, who was wont for hire
 To bear the traveller o'er the rapid flood
 Of deep Evenus : not with oars or sail 560
 He stemm'd the torrent, but with nervous arm
 Opposed and pass'd it ; me, when first a bride,
 I left my father's hospitable roof

With my Alcides, in his arms he bore
 Athwart the current ; half way o'er, he dared 565
 To offer violence : I shriek'd aloud ;
 When, lo ! the son of Jove, his bow swift bent,
 Sent forth a shaft, and pierced the monster's breast,
 Who with his dying voice did thus address me ;—
 “ Daughter of Ceneus, listen to my words, 570
 So shalt thou profit by the last sad journey
 Which I shall ever go : if in thy hand
 Thou take the drops out-flowing from the wound
 This arrow made, dipp'd in the envenom'd blood
 Of the Lernæan hydra, with that charm 575
 Mayst thou subdue the heart of thy Alcides,

Nor shall another ever gain his love."
 Mindful of this, my friends (for from that hour
 In secret have I kept the precious gift),
 Behold a garment dipp'd in the very blood 580
 He gave me : nor did I forget to add
 What he enjoin'd, but have prepared it all.
 I know no evil arts, nor would I learn them ;
 For they who practise such are hateful to me :
 I only wish the charm may be of power 585
 To win Alcides from this virgin's love,
 And bring him back to Dejanira's arms,
 If ye shall deem it lawful ; but if not,
 I'll go no farther.

CHO. Could we be assured
 Such is indeed the effect, 'tis well determined. 590

DEJ. I cannot but believe it ; though, as yet,
 Experience never hath confirm'd it to me.

CHO. Thou shouldst be certain ; thou but seem'st
 to know,

If thou hast never tried.

DEJ. I'll try it soon ;
 For see, ev'n now he comes out at the portal. 595
 Let him not know our purpose ; if the deed
 Be wrong, concealment may prevent reproach :
 Therefore be silent.

Enter LICHAS.

LI. Speak thy last commands,
 Daughter of Æneus, for already long
 Have we delay'd our journey.

DEJ. Know, then, Lichas, 600
 That while thou communest with thy friends, myself
 Have hither brought a garment which I wove
 For my Alcides : thou must bear it to him :
 Tell him, no mortal must with touch profane
 Pollute the sacred gift, nor sun behold it, 605
 Nor holy temple, nor domestic hearth,
 Ere at the altar of paternal Jove
 Himself shall wear it ; 'twas my solemn vow,

Whene'er he should return, that, clothed in this,
 He to the gods should offer sacrifice : 610
 Bear too, this token ; he will know it well.
 Away ! remember to perform thy office,
 But go no farther ; so shall double praise,
 And favour from us both, reward thy duty.

LI. If I have aught of skill, by Hermes right 615
 Instructed in his art, I will not fail
 To bear thy gift, and faithful to report
 What thou hast said.

DEJ. Begone ; what here hath pass'd
 Thou know'st.

LI. I do ; and shall bear back the news
 That all is well.

DEJ. Thou art thyself a witness 620
 How kindly I received the guest he sent me.

LI. It fill'd my heart with pleasure to behold it.

DEJ. What canst thou tell him more ? Alas ! I fear
 He'll know too well the love I bear to him :
 Would I could be as certain he'd return it ! [*Exeunt.*]

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

You, who on Ceta's craggy summit dwell ; 626
 Or from the rock, whence gushing rivulets flow,
 Bathe in the warmer springs below ;
 You who, near the Melian bay,
 To golden-shafted Dian hymn the lay, 630
 Now haste to string the lyre, and tune the vocal shell.

ANTISTROPHE I.

No mournful theme demands your pensive strain ;

611 This token was a seal-ring, which Dejanira sent with the vest, to convince Hercules that it came from her.

615 Hermes or Mercury always appears as messenger of the gods : he therefore naturally presided over mortal messengers, and is properly mentioned by the herald as his patron and instructor.

629 The bay of Melis was not far from Trachis, and adjoining to Artemisium : near it was a temple sacred to Diana.

SOPH.—T

But such as, kindled by the sacred fire,
 The Muses might themselves admire,
 A loud and cheerful song; for see, 635
 The son of Jove returns with victory,
 And richest spoils reward a life of toil and pain.

STROPHÉ II.

Far from his native land he took his way;
 For twelve long moons, uncertain of his fate,
 Did we lament his exiled state, 640
 What time his anxious wife deplored,
 With never-ceasing tears, her absent lord;
 But Mars at last hath closed his long, laborious day.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Let him from fair Eubœa's isle appear;
 Let winds and raging seas oppose no more, 645
 But waft him to the wish'd-for shore.
 The anointed vest's persuasive charms
 Shall bring him soon to Dejanira's arms.
 Soon shall we see the great, the loved Alcides here.

ACT IV.

DEJANIRA, CHORUS.

DEJ. Alas, my friends! I fear, I've gone too far.

CHO. Great queen! in what?

DEJ. I know not what; but dread 651
 Something to come, lest, where I had most hope
 Of happiness, I meet with bitterest wo.

CHO. Mean'st thou thy gift to Hercules?

DEJ. I do!
 Nor would I henceforth counsel those I loved 655
 To do a dark and desperate deed like this,
 Uncertain of the event.

CHO. How was it? Speak,
 If thou canst tell us.

DEJ. O! 'twas wonderful;
 For you shall hear it: know, then, the white wool
 Wherein I wrapp'd the anointed vest, untouch'd 660

By any hand, dropp'd self-consumed away,
 And down the stone, e'en like a liquid, flow'd
 Dissolving ; but 'tis fit I tell you all.
 Whate'er the wounded centaur did enjoin me,
 Mindful to practise, sacred as the laws 665
 On brazen tablets graved, I have perform'd.
 Far from the fire, and from the sun's warm beams,
 He bade me keep the charm from every eye
 In secret hid, till time should call on me
 To anoint and use it : this was done ; and now, 670
 The fleece in sacred pluck'd, the charm prepared,
 Long from the sun within a chest conceal'd,
 At length I brought it forth, and sent the gift
 To my Alcides ; when, behold ! a wonder,
 Most strange for tongue to tell, or heart of man 675
 Ev'n to conceive ! Perchance the wool I cast
 Into the sunshine : soon as it grew warm,
 It fell to dust, consuming all away
 In most strange manner ; then from the earth up rose
 In frothy bubbles, ev'n as from the grape, 680
 In yellow autumn, flows the purple wine.
 I know not what to think ; but much I fear
 I've done a horrid deed : for, why, my friends !
 Why should the dying savage wish to serve
 His murderer ? That could never be : O no ; 685
 He only meant by flattery to destroy
 Me, his destroyer : truth is come too late,
 And I alone have slain my dear Alcides.
 I know that by his arrows Chiron fell ;
 I know, whate'er they touch'd, they still were fatal ;
 That very poison mingled with the blood 691
 Of dying Nessus ; will not that too kill
 My Hercules ? It must ; but if he dies,
 My resolution is to perish with him.
 Those, who their honour and their virtue prize, 695
 Can never live with infamy and shame.

CHO. 'Tis fit we tremble at a deed of horror ;

689 Chiron was one of the centaurs, and was wounded by Hercules with one of his arrows dipped in the blood of the hydra.

But 'tis not fitting, ere we know the event,
To give up hope, and yield us to despair.

DEJ. There is no hope where evil counsel's taken.

CHO. But when we err from ignorance alone, 701
Small is the crime, and slight the punishment :
Such is thy fault.

DEJ. The guiltless may talk thus,
Who know no ill : not those who are unhappy.

CHO. No more, unless thou mean'st thy son should
hear thee, 705
Who now returns in search of thy Alcides.
Behold him here.

Enter HYLUS.

HYL. O ! would that thou wert dead !
Would I were not thy son ! or, being so,
Would I could change thy wicked heart !

DEJ. My son !
What means this passion ?

HYL. Thou hast slain thy husband ; 710
This very day my father hast thou slain.

DEJ. Alas ! my child, what say'st thou ?

HYL. What is past,
And therefore must be : who can e'er undo
The deed that's done ?

DEJ. But who could say I did it ?

HYL. I saw it with these eyes ; I heard it all 715
From his own lips.

DEJ. Where didst thou see him then ?
Tell me, O ! quickly tell me.

HYL. If I must,
Observe me well : when Hercules, return'd
From conquest, had laid waste the noble city
Of Eurytus, with fair triumphal spoils 720
He to Eubœa came, where, o'er the sea,
Which beats on every side, Cenzæum's top
Hangs dreadful : thither (to paternal Jove)
His new-raised altars in the leafy wood
He came to visit ; there did my glad eyes 725
Behold Alcides first. As he prepared

The frequent victim, from the palace came
 Lichas thy messenger, and with him brought
 The fatal gift: wrapp'd in the deadly garment
 (For such was thy command), twelve oxen then, 730
 Without a blemish, firstlings of the spoil,
 He slew; together next a hundred fell,
 The mingled flock: pleased with his gaudy vest,
 And happy in it, he awhile remain'd,
 Offering with joy his grateful sacrifice: 735
 But, lo! when from the holy victim rose
 The bloody flame, and from the pitchy wood
 Exhaled its moisture, sudden a cold sweat
 Bedew'd his limbs, and to his body stuck
 (As by the hand of some artificer 740
 Close join'd to every part) the fatal vest.
 Convulsion rack'd his bones, and through his veins,
 Like the fell serpent's deadly venom, raged.
 Then question'd he the wretched, guiltless Lichas,
 By what detested arts he had procured 745
 The poison'd garb: he, ignorant of all,
 Could only say it was the gift he brought
 From Dejanira: when Alcides heard it,
 Tortured with pain, he took him by the foot,
 And hurl'd him headlong on a pointed rock 750
 That o'er the ocean hung: his brains, dash'd forth,
 With mingled blood flow'd through his clotted hair
 In horrid streams. The multitude, with shrieks,
 Lamented loud the fury of Alcides,
 And Lichas' hapless fate: none durst oppose 755
 His raging phrensy; prostrate on the earth
 Now would he lie and groan; and now, uprising,
 Would bellow forth his griefs. The mountain tops
 Of Locris, and Eubœa's rocks return'd
 His dreadful cries: then, on the ground outstretch'd,
 In bitterest wrath he cursed the nuptial bed 761
 Of CENEUS, and his execrations pour'd
 On thee, his worst of foes: at length his eyes,
 Distorted forth from the surrounding smoke,
 He cast on me, who mid attending crowds 765

Wept his sad fate. "Approach," he cried, "my son!
 Do not forsake thy father; rather come,
 And share his fate, than leave me here. O! haste,
 And take me hence; bear me where never eye
 Of mortal shall behold me. O, my child! 770
 Let me not perish here." Thus spake my father,
 And I obeyed: distracted with his pains,
 A vessel brings him to this place, and soon,
 Living or dead, you will behold him here.
 This have thy horrid machinations done 775
 For thy Alcides. O! may Justice doom thee
 To righteous punishment, if it be lawful
 For me to call down vengeance on a mother,
 As sure it is, on one who hath disclaim'd
 All piety like thee. The earth sustains not 780
 A better man than he whom thou hast murder'd,
 Nor shalt thou e'er behold his like again.

[*Exit Dejanira.*

CHO. Whence this abrupt departure? Know'st
 thou not

To go in silence thus confirms thy guilt!

HYL. Let her be gone: and may some prosperous
 gale 785

Waft her far off, that these abhorring eyes
 May never see her more! What boots the name
 Of mother, when no longer she performs
 A mother's duty? Let her go in peace;
 And, for her kindness to my father, soon 790
 May she enjoy the blessings she bestow'd!

, CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

True was the oracle divine,
 Long since delivered from Dodona's shrine,
 Which said Alcides' woes should last
 Till twelve revolving years were past; 795
 Then should his labours end in sweet repose.
 Behold, my friends! 'tis come to pass;
 'Tis all fulfill'd; for who, alas!
 In peaceful death or toil or slavery knows?

ANTISTROPHE I.

If deep within his tortured veins
 The centaur's cruel poison reigns,
 That from the hydra's baleful breath
 Destructive flow'd, replete with death,
 On him another sun shall never rise :
 The venom runs through every part,
 And, lo ! to Nessus' direful art
 Alcides falls a helpless sacrifice.

800

805

STROPHE II.

Poor Dejanira long deplored
 Her waning charms, and ever-faithless lord :
 At length, by evil counsel sway'd,
 Her passion's dictates she obey'd,
 Resolved Alcides' doubtful truth to prove ;
 But now, alas ! laments his fate
 In ceaseless wo, and finds too late
 A dying husband and a foreign love.

810

815

ANTISTROPHE II.

Another death must soon succeed,
 Another victim soon shall bleed :
 Fatal, Alcides ! was the dart
 That pierced the rival monarch's heart,
 And brought Iole from her native land.
 From Venus did our sorrows flow,
 The secret spring of all our wo ;
 For naught was done but by her dread command.
 [*Exeunt.*]

820

ACT V.

[*A noise within the palace.*]

CHORUS.

OR I'm deceived, or I did hear loud shrieks
 Within the palace ; 'twas the voice of one
 In anguish. Doubtless, some calamity
 Hath fallen upon us now : what can it be ?

825

816 The Chorus here foretels the death of Dejanira.

But see, yon matron, with contracted brow
And unaccustomed sadness, comes to tell
The dreadful news.

Enter NURSE.

NURSE. What woes, my hapless daughters,
Alcides' fatal gift hath brought upon us! 831

CHO. What dost thou tell us?

NURSE. Dejanira treads
The last sad path of mortals.

CHO. Is she gone?

NURSE. 'Tis so, indeed.

CHO. What! dead?

NURSE. Again I say,
She is no more.

CHO. Alas! how did she perish? 835

NURSE. Most fearfully: 'twas dreadful to behold.

CHO. How fell she then?

NURSE. By her own hand.

CHO. But wherefore?

What madness, what disorder? What could move
her

To perpetrate so terrible a deed,

Thus adding death to death?

NURSE. The fatal steel 840
Destroy'd her.

CHO. Didst thou see it?

NURSE. I was by,
Close by her side.

CHO. How was it?

NURSE. Her own arm
Struck the sad blow.

CHO. Indeed!

NURSE. Most veritably.

CHO. In evil hour this rival virgin came
To bring destruction here.

NURSE. And so she did: 845
Hadst thou, like me, been witness to the deed,
Thou wouldst much more have pitied her.

CHO.

Alas !

How could a woman do it !

NURSE.

'Twas most dreadful,

As thou shalt hear, for I will tell thee all.

Soon as she enter'd at the palace gate, 850

And saw her son prepare the funeral bed,

To the inmost chamber silent she retired

From every eye ; there at the altar's feet

Falling lamented loud her widow'd state ;

And ever as she lit on aught her hands 855

Had used in happier days, the tears would flow.

From room to room she wander'd ; and, if chance

A loved domestic cross'd her, she would weep

And mourn her fate, for ever now deprived

Of converse sweet, and hymeneal joys : 860

Then would she strew her garments on the bed

Of her Alcides ; for conceal'd I watch'd

Her every motion ; throw herself upon it ;

And, as the tears in a warm flood burst forth,

"Farewell !" she cried, "for ever farewell now, 865

My nuptial couch ! for never shalt thou more

Receive this wretched burthen." Thus she spake,

And with quick hand the golden button loosed ;

Then cast her robe aside, her bosom bared,

And seemed prepared to strike. I ran and told 870

The dreadful purpose to her son : too late

We came, and saw her wounded to the heart.

The pious son beheld his bleeding mother,

And wept ; for well he knew, by anger fired,

And the fell centaur's cruel fraud betray'd, 875

Unweeting she had done the dreadful deed.

Close to her side he laid him down, and join'd

His lips to hers, lamenting sore that thus

He had accused her guiltless ; then deplored

His own sad fate, thus suddenly bereaved 880

Of both his parents : you have heard my tale.

Who to himself shall promise length of life ?

None but the fool : for, O ! to-day alone

Is ours ; we are not certain of to-morrow.

CHO. Which shall I weep? Which most our
 hearts should fill 885
 With grief, the present or the future ill,
 The dying or the dead? 'Tis equal wo,
 To feel the stroke, or fear the impending blow.

STROPHE.

O! for a breeze to waft us o'er,
 Propitious to some distant shore! 890
 To shield our souls from sore affright,
 And save us from the dreadful sight!
 That sight the hardest heart would move,—
 In his last pangs the son of Jove:
 To see the poison run through every vein, 895
 And limbs convulsed with agonizing pain.

ANTISTROPHE.

Behold the attendant train is nigh;
 I hear the voice of misery.
 Ev'n as the plaintive nightingale,
 That warbles sweet her mournful tale: 900
 Silent and slow they lead him on.
 Hark! I hear Alcides groan!
 Again 'tis silence all! This way they tread:
 Or sleeps he now, or rests he with the dead?

Enter HERCULES, HYLLUS, ATTENDANTS.

HVL. Alas, my father! whither shall I go? 905
 Wretch that I am! O, where shall I betake me?
 What will become of thy afflicted son?

ATT. Speak softly, youth! do not awake his pains;
 Refrain thy grief, for yet Alcides lives,
 Though verging to the tomb: be calm.

HVL. What say'st thou? 910
 Doth he yet live?

ATT. He doth; disturb not thus
 His slumbers, nor provoke the dire disease.

HVL. Alas! I cannot bear to see him thus.

[*Hercules awakes.*]

HER. O Jove! where am I, and with whom? What
 land

Contains the wretched Hercules, oppress'd 915
With never-ending woes! Ah me! again
The deadly poison racks me.

ATT. [*to Hyllus.*] Seest thou not
'Twere better far to have remain'd in silence,
And not awaked him?

HYL. 'Twas impossible
Unmoved to look on such calamity; 920
I could not do it.

HER. O Ccenæan rocks,
Where smoke the sacred altars! Is it thus,
O Jove! thou dost reward my piety?
What dreadful punishment is this thy hand
Hath laid on me, who never could deserve 925
Such bitter wrath? What incantations now,
What power of medicine, can assuage my pain,
Unless great Jove assisted? Health to me
Without him were a miracle indeed.

Let me, O! let me rest; refuse me not 930
A little slumber: why will ye torment me?
Why bend me forward? O! 'tis worse than death.
Had you not waked me, I had been at peace.
Again it rages with redoubled force.

Where are you now, ye thankless Grecians? where,
Whom I have toil'd to serve on the rough main, 936
And through the pathless wood? Where are ye now,
To help the dying wretch? Will no kind hand
Stretch forth the friendly sword, or in the flame
Consume me? None, alas! will cut me off 940
From hated life.

ATT. O youth! assist thy father;
It is beyond my strength: thy quicker sight
May be more useful.

HYL. My poor aid is ready;
But wheresoe'er I am, 'tis not in me
To expel the subtil poison that destroys him; 945
Such is the will of Jove.

HER. My son! my son!
Where art thou? Bear me up; assist me; O!

Again it comes, the unconquerable ill,
 The dire disease. O Pallas ! aid me now :
 Draw forth thy sword, my son ! strike, strike thy fa-
 ther, 950

And heal the wound thy impious mother made.
 O ! could I see her like myself destroy'd,
 I should be happy. Brother of great Jove !
 Sweet Pluto ! hear me. O ! with speedy death
 Lay me to rest, and bury all my woes. 955

CHO. The anguish of the unhappy man, my friends !
 Is terrible : I tremble but to hear him.

HER. What hath this body suffer'd ! O, the toils,
 The labours I endured, the pangs I felt,
 Unutterable woes ! but never aught 960
 So dreadful as this sore calamity
 Oppress'd Alcides : not the wife of Jove,
 Nor vile Eurystheus could torment me thus,
 As, Ceneus ! thy deceitful daughter hath.
 O ! I am tangled in a cruel net 965
 Woven by the Furies ; it devours my flesh,
 Dries up my veins, and drinks the vital blood.
 My body's wither'd, and I cannot break
 The indissoluble chain : nor hostile spear,
 Nor earth-born giants, nor the savage herd, 970
 The wild barbarian, nor the Grecian host,
 Not all the nations I have journey'd o'er,
 Could do a deed like this : at last I fall,
 Like a poor coward, by a woman's hand,
 Unarm'd and unassisted. O my son ! 975
 Now prove thyself the offspring of Alcides,
 Nor let thy reverence of a mother's name
 Surpass thy duty to an injured father.
 Go, bring her hither, give her to my wrath,
 That I may see whom thou wilt most lament, 980
 When thou behold'st my vengeance fall on her.
 Fear not, my son ! but go ; have pity on me,
 Pity thy father : all must pity me,
 While they behold, ev'n as the tender maid,
 Alcides weep, who never wept before. 985

I bore my sorrows all without a groan ;
 But now thou seest I am a very woman.
 Come near, my child ! O ! think what I endure,
 For I will show thee : look on this poor body ;
 Let all behold it. What a sight is here ! 990
 O me ! again the cruel poison tears
 My entrails, nor affords a moment's ease.
 O take me, Pluto ! to thy gloomy reign ;
 Father of lightning ! mighty Jove ! send down
 Thy bolt, and strike me now ! Again it racks, 995
 It tortures me. O hands, that once had strength !
 And you, my sinewy arms ! was it by you
 The terrible Nemæan lion fell,
 The dreadful hydra, and the lawless race
 Of centaurs ? Did this wither'd hand subdue 1000
 The Erymanthian boar, wide-wasting plague !
 And from the shades of Orcus drag to light
 The triple-headed monster ? By this arm
 Did the fierce guardian of the golden fruit
 In Libya's deserts fall ? Unnumbered toils 1005
 Have I endured of old, and never yet
 Did mortal bear a trophy from Alcides :
 But nerveless now this arm : see from the bone
 Darts the loose flesh : I waste beneath the power
 Of this dark pestilence. O Hercules ! 1010
 Why boast thy mother sprung of noblest race,
 And vainly call thyself the son of Jove !
 But mark me well ; this creeping shadow still,
 Poor as it is, shall yet revenge itself
 On her who did the execrable deed. 1015
 Would she were here to feel my wrath ; to know
 And teach mankind that Hercules, though dead,
 As while he lived, can scourge the guilty still !

998 Nemæ was a wood near Argia in Peloponnesus, where Hercules slew a lion of prodigious size and fierceness.

1001 Erymanthus was a mountain of Arcadia, where Hercules slew a wild boar that infested the country.

SOPH.—U

CHO. Unhappy Greece! how wilt thou mourn the
loss
Of such a man!

HYL. Permit me but to speak, 1020
Distemper'd as thou art, my father! hear me:
Naught shall I ask unfit for thee to grant.
Be calm, and listen to me; yet thou know'st not
How groundless thy complaints, and what new joy
Awaits thee still.

HER. Be brief, then, and inform me: 1025
My pains afflict me so, I cannot guess
Thy subtle purpose.

HYL. 'Twas to speak of her
My mother; 'twas to tell thee of her state,
And how unweeting she offended thee.

HER. Thou worst of children! wouldst thou then
defend 1030
The murder of thy father? darest thou thus
Recall the sad remembrance of her crime?

HYL. It must not be conceal'd: I know too well
I can no longer hide it.

HER. What? Her guilt?
'Tis known already.

HYL. Thou'lt not always think so. 1035

HER. Speak then, but take good heed thou show
thyself
Worthy thy father.

HYL. Know then,—she is dead.

HER. O, dreadful! murder'd? By what hand?

HYL. Her own.

HER. Would she had fallen by mine!

HYL. Alas, my father,
Didst thou know all, thy anger would be changed
To pity for her.

HER. That were strange indeed: 1041
Why dost thou think so?

HYL. She did mean thee well,
But err'd unknowing

HYL. Thy new marriage was the cause :
She had prepared a filter for thy love, 1045
And knew not 'twas a poison.

HYL. Thy savage centaur Nessus,
Who did persuade her 'twould restore thy love
Given to another wife.

HYL. Alcmena's gone
To Tirynth ; with her many of thy sons
Remain : some dwell at Thebes ; the rest are here,
And wait with me to hear and to obey thee. 1061

1059 Tirynth or Tirynthia was a city in the neighbourhood of Argos.

And rest their wearied limbs on the cold ground),
 An ancient oak prophetic did declare,
 That if I lived to this decisive hour, 1075
 Here all my labours, all my toils should end.
 I thought it told me I should live in peace ;
 Alás ! it only meant that I must die ;
 For death will put an end to every care.
 Since thus it is, my son, thou too must join 1080
 To ease Alcides : let me not reproach thee :
 But yield thy willing aid, nor e'er forget
 The best of laws,—obedience to a father.

HYL. Thy words affright me, but declare thy
 purpose :
 Behold me ready to perform thy orders. 1085
 Whate'er they be.

HER. First give me then thy hand.

HYL. But why this pledge, and wherefore anxious
 thus

Dost thou require it ?

HER. Wilt thou give it me,
 Or dost refuse ?

HYL. There, take it ; I obey.

HER. First swear then by the head of Jove, my
 sire. 1090

HYL. I will ; but what ?

HER. Swear that thou wilt perform
 All I enjoin thee.

HYL. Bear me witness, Jove !
 I swear.

HER. And imprecate the wrath divine,
 If thou perform'st it not.

HYL. I shall not fail ;
 But, if I do, may vengeance swift o'ertake me ! 1095

HER. Thou know'st the top of Ceta's sacred hill !

HYL. I know it well, and many a sacrifice
 Have offer'd there.

HER. That is the destin'd place,
 Where thou, assisted by thy chosen friends,
 My son ! must bear the body of Alcides ; 1100

There shalt thou cut thee many a leafy branch
 From the wild olive and deep-rooted oak ;
 Then cast me on it, take thy torch, and light
 My funeral pile. Without one tear or groan
 Unmanly do it, if thou art my son : 1105
 For if thou fail'st, remember, after death,
 A father's curses will sit heavy on thee.

HYL. Alas, my father ! what hast thou com-
 manded !

What hast thou bade me do !

HER. What must be done,
 Or thou art not the son of Hercules. 1110

HYL. A dreadful deed ! And must I then become
 A parricide, and murder thee ?

HER. O, no !
 My kind physician, balm of all my woes.

HYL. Myself to cast thee in the flames ? Is that
 An office fit for me ?

HER. If that alone 1115
 Seem dreadful to thee, yet perform the rest.

HYL. I'll bear thee thither.

HER. Wilt thou raise the pile ?

HYL. I will do any thing but be myself
 The executioner.

HER. 'Tis well, my son !
 But one thing more, and I am satisfied ; 1120
 'Tis but a little.

HYL. Be it e'er so great,
 I shall obey.

HER. Thou know'st the virgin daughter
 Of Eurytus ?

HYL. Iole ?

HER. Her, my son.
 Remember, 'tis a father's last command,
 And thou hast sworn obedience ; that Iole 1125
 I do bequeath thee : take her to thy arms,
 When I am dead, and let her be thy wife :
 It is not fitting she, who lay by the side
 Of Hercules, to any but the son

Of Hercules should e'er descend : to thee 1130

Alone I yield her. Speak not, but obey me :

After thy kind compliance, to refuse

So slight a favour were to cancel all.

HYL. Alas! distempered as he is, to chide him [*aside*,
Were most unkind; and yet, what madness this! 1135

HER. Thou wilt not do it, then!

HYL. What! marry her
Who slew my mother? Her, who hath brought
thee

To this sad state? It were an act of phrensy:

Death be my portion rather than to live

With those I hate.

HER. [*turning to the Chorus.*] He will not pay me
then 1140

The duty which he owes a dying father:

But, if thou dost not, curses from the gods

Await thee.

HYL. O, thou ravest: it is the rage
Of thy distemper makes thee talk so wildly.

HER. Thou hast awaken'd all my woes; again
They torture now.

HYL. Alas, what doubts arise, 1146
What fears perplex me!

HER. Mean'st thou to dispute
A father's will?

HYL. Must I then learn of thee
To do a wicked deed?

HER. It is not wicked
If I request it of thee.

HYL. Is it just? 1150

HER. It is: the gods are witnesses 'tis just.

HYL. Then by those gods I swear I will per-
form

What thou command'st: I never can be deem'd

Or base or impious for obeying thee.

HER. 'Tis well, my son! one added kindness
more, 1155

And I am satisfied: before the racks

Of dire convulsion and the pangs of madness
 Again attack me, throw me on the pile.
 Haste then, and bear me to it ; there at last 1159
 I shall have peace, and rest from all my sorrows.

HYL. Since 'tis thy will, my father, we submit.

HER. Now, ere the dreadful malady return,
 Be firm, my soul ! ev'n as the harden'd steel ;
 Suspend thy cries, and meet the fatal blow 1164
 With joy and pleasure. Bear me hence, my friends,
 For you have shown yourselves my friends indeed,
 And proved the base ingratitude of those
 From whom I sprang, the cruel gods, who saw
 Unmoved the woes of their unhappy son.
 'Tis not in mortal to foresee his fate ; 1170
 Mine is to them disgraceful, and to me
 Most terrible ; to me, of all mankind
 The most distress'd, the poor, the lost Alcides.

CHO. Iole, come not forth, unhappy virgin !
 Already hast thou seen enough of wo, 1175
 And yet fresh sorrows wait thee ; but remember,
 All is decreed, and all the work of Jove.

1174 Iole, we may suppose, is coming on the stage, anxious to know the fate of Hercules ; but is stopped by the Chorus, and prevented from being a witness of the melancholy scene. Hercules is led out by Hyllus, who had promised to accompany him to Mount Ceta, where he expired.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

ŒDIPUS, king of Thebes.

JOCASTA, wife of Œdipus.

CREON, brother to Jocasta.

TIRESIAS, a blind prophet of Thebes.

A SHEPHERD from Corinth.

A MESSENGER.

AN OLD SHEPHERD, formerly belonging to Laius.

HIGH PRIEST of Jupiter.

CHORUS, composed of the priests and ancient men of Thebes, Theban youths, children of Œdipus, attendants, &c.

ŒDIPUS TYRANNUS.

ARGUMENT.

LAIUS, king of Thebes, having learned from the oracle of Apollo that he was destined to perish by the hand of his son, commanded his wife Jocasta to destroy her infant as soon as it came into the world. The mother accordingly gave the child to a domestic, with orders to expose him on Mount Cithæron, where he was found by one of the shepherds of Polybus, king of Corinth; who, having no children, determined, by the advice of his queen, to keep the boy in ignorance of the circumstances of his birth, and educate him as his own son. When Œdipus had arrived at years of maturity, he went to consult the oracle, which terrified him with the intelligence that he would commit parricide and incest. He now therefore resolved to return to Corinth no more; and travelling towards Phocis, met Laius, and, in a dispute which ensued, slew him. As Œdipus was ignorant of the rank and quality of the man whom he had killed, he was attracted to Thebes by the report of the sphinx; the overthrow of which monster raised him to the throne, while the prophecy was completed by his nuptials with the widow of Laius, by whom he had four children. The Theban territories were at length desolated by a plague, which the oracle declared should cease when the murderer of Laius was banished from Boeotia. After a minute investigation, the dreadful secret was at length divulged; and Jocasta put a period to her existence, while Œdipus deprived himself of sight, and was, at his own request, banished from Thebes by the order of Creon, the brother of Jocasta, who then assumed the reins of government.

ACT I.

Scene, Thebes before the palace of Œdipus.

ŒDIPUS, HIGH-PRIEST OF JUPITER.

ŒDI. O MY loved sons! the youthful progeny
Of ancient Cadmus! wherefore sit you here,
And suppliant thus, with sacred boughs adorn'd,
Crowd to our altars? Frequent sacrifice,
And prayers, and sighs, and sorrows fill the land. 5
I could have sent to learn the fatal cause:
But see, your anxious sovereign comes himself
To know it all from you: behold your king,
Renowned Œdipus. Do thou, old man
(For best that office suits thy years), inform me 10
Why you are come. Is it the present ill
That calls you here, or dread of future wo?
Hard were indeed the heart that did not feel
For grief like yours, and pity such distress.
If there be aught that Œdipus can do 15
To serve his people, know me for your friend.

PRIEST. O king! thou seest what numbers throng
thy altars.
Here, bending sad beneath the weight of years,
The hoary priests, here crowd the chosen youth
Of Thebes, with these a weak and suppliant train 20
Of helpless infants: last, in me behold
The minister of Jove: far off thou seest
Assembled multitudes, with laurel crown'd,
To where Minerva's hallow'd temples rise
Frequent repair, or where Ismenus laves 25
Apollo's sacred shrine. Too well thou know'st,

1 Œdipus, alarmed at the groans and lamentations of his people thronging to the altar, comes out of his palace to inquire into the cause of their distress. He calls his subjects the progeny of Cadmus, who was the founder of Thebes, about two hundred years before his time.

Thy wretched Thebes, with dreadful storms oppress'd,
 Scarce lifts her head above the whelming flood :
 The teeming earth her blasted harvest mourns,
 And on the barren plain the flocks and herds 30
 Unnumber'd perish ; dire abortion thwarts
 The mother's hopes, and painful she brings forth
 The half-formed infant ; baleful pestilence
 Hath laid our city waste ; the fiery god
 Stalks o'er deserted Thebes ; while, with our groans
 Enrich'd, the gloomy god of Erebus 36
 Triumphant smiles. O Œdipus ! to thee
 We bend : behold these youths ; with me they kneel,
 And suppliant at thy altars sue for aid,
 To thee, the first of men, and only less 40
 Than they, whose favour thou alone canst gain,
 The gods above : thy wisdom yet may heal
 The deep-felt wounds, and make the powers divine
 Propitious to us. Thebes long since to thee
 Her safety owed, when, from the sphinx deliver'd,
 Thy grateful people saw thee, not by man 46
 But by the gods instructed, save the land.
 Now, then, thou best of kings ! assist us now :
 O ! by some mortal or immortal aid
 Now succour the distress'd ! On wisdom oft 50
 And prudent counsels, in the hour of ill,
 Success awaits. O dearest prince ! support,
 Relieve thy Thebes ; on thee, its saviour once,
 Again it calls : now, if thou wouldst not see
 The memory perish of thy former deeds, 55
 Let it not call in vain ; but rise, and save.

45 The sphinx, according to poetical history, was a monster with the face of a woman, wings of a bird, body of a dog, and claws like a lion : she dwelt near Thebes, and every day destroyed many people. The oracle declared that she could never be conquered till some one was found that could expound a certain riddle which she proposed. After many unsuccessful attempts, Œdipus came, and explained it ; the sphinx was destroyed, the nation delivered, and Œdipus rewarded for it with the kingdom of Thebes.

SOPH.—X

With happiest omens once, and fair success,
 We saw thee crown'd : O ! be thyself again,
 And may thy will and fortune be the same !
 If thou art yet to reign, O king ! remember, 60
 A sovereign's riches is a peopled realm ;
 For what will ships or lofty towers avail,
 Unarm'd with men to guard and to defend them ?

ŒDI. O my unhappy sons ! too well I know
 Your sad estate ; I know the woes of Thebes : 65
 And yet among you lives not such a wretch
 As Œdipus ; for O ! on me, my children !
 Your sorrows press. Alas ! I feel for you,
 My people, for myself, for Thebes, for all.
 Think not I slept regardless of your ills ; 70
 O no ; with many a tear I wept your fate,
 And oft in meditation deep revolved
 How best your peace and safety to restore.
 The only medicine that my thoughts could find
 I have administered : Menœceus' son, 75
 The noble Creon, went by my command
 To Delphi, from Apollo's shrine to know
 What must be done to save this wretched land.
 'Tis time he were returned ; I wonder much
 At his delay : if, when he comes, your king 80
 Perform not all the god enjoins, then say
 He is the worst of men.

PRIEST. O king ! thy words
 Are gracious ; and, if right these youths inform me,
 Creon is here.

ŒDI. O Phœbus ! grant he come
 With tidings cheerful as the smile he wears ! 85

PRIEST. He is the messenger of good ; for see,
 His brows are crown'd with laurel.

ŒDI. We shall soon
 Be satisfied : he comes.

Enter CREON, CHORUS.

My dearest Creon !
 O ! say, what answer bear'st thou from the god ?
 Or good or ill ?

CRE. • Good, very good; for know, 90
The worst of ills, if rightly used, may prove
The means of happiness.

ŒDI. What says my friend?
This answer gives me naught to hope or fear.

CRE. Shall we retire, or would you that I speak
In public here?

ŒDI. Before them all declare it: 95
Their woes sit heavier on me than my own.

CRE. Then mark what I have heard: the god
commands

That instant we drive forth the fatal cause
Of this dire pestilence, nor nourish here
The accursed monster.

ŒDI. Who? what monster? how 100
Remove it?

CRE. Or by banishment, or death:
Life must be given for life; for yet his blood
Rests on the city.

ŒDI. Whose? what means the god?

CRE. O king! before thee Laius ruled o'er Thebes.

ŒDI. I know he did, though I did ne'er behold
him. 105

CRE. Laius was slain, and on his murderers
(So Phœbus says) we must have vengeance.

ŒDI. Where,
Where are the murderers? who shall trace the guilt
Buried so long in silence?

CRE. Here, he said,
Ev'n in this land: what's sought for may be found;
But truth, unsearch'd for, seldom comes to light. 111

ŒDI. How did he fall, and where? at home,
abroad?

Died he at Thebes, or in a foreign land?

CRE. He left his palace, fame reports, to seek
Some oracle; since that we ne'er beheld him. 115

ŒDI. But did no messenger return? Not one
Of all his train, of whom we might inquire
Touching this murder?

CRE. One, and one alone,
Came back, who, flying, 'scaped the general slaughter;

But nothing, save one little circumstance, 120
Or knew, or e'er related.

ŒDI. What was that?
Much may be learn'd from that; a little dawn;
Of light appearing, may discover all.

CRE. Laius, attack'd by robbers, and oppress'd
By number, fell; such is his tale.

ŒDI. Would they,— 125
Would robbers do so desperate a deed,
Unbribed and unassisted?

CRE. So indeed
Suspicion whisper'd then; but, Laius dead,
No friend was found to vindicate the wrong.

ŒDI. But what strange cause could stop inquiry
thus 130
Into the murder of a king?

CRE. The sphinx:
Her dire enigma kept our thought intent
On present ills, nor gave us time to search
The past mysterious deed.

ŒDI. Myself will try
Soon to unveil it: thou, Apollo! well, 135
And well hast thou, my Creon! lent thy aid;
Your Œdipus shall now perform his part:
Yes, I will fight for Phœbus and my country,
And so I ought; for not to friends alone
Or kindred owe I this, but to myself. 140

Who murder'd him perchance would murder me;
His cause is mine; wherefore, my children! rise,
Take hence your suppliant boughs, and summon
here

The race of Cadmus, my assembled people.
Naught shall be left untried: Apollo leads, 145
And we will rise to joy, or sink for ever.

PRIEST. Haste then, my sons! for this we hither
came;

About it quick ; and may the god, who sent
This oracle, protect, defend, and save us ! [*Exeunt.*

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

O, thou great oracle divine ! 150
Who didst to happy Thebes remove,
From Delphi's golden shrine,
And in sweet sounds declare the will of Jove ;
Daughter of hope ! O ! sooth my soul to rest,
And calm the rising tumult in my breast. 155
Look down, O Phœbus ! on thy loved abode ;
Speak, for thou know'st the dark decrees of fate,
Our present and our future state.
O Delian ! be thou still our healing god !

ANTISTROPHE I.

Minerva ! first on thee I call, 160
Daughter of Jove, immortal maid ;
Low beneath thy feet we fall :
O ! bring thy sister Dian to our aid.
Goddess of Thebes ! from thy imperial throne
Look with an eye of gentle pity down ; 165
And thou, far-shooting Phœbus ! once the friend
Of this unhappy, this devoted land ;
O ! now, if ever, let thy hand
Once more be stretched to save and to defend.

● STROPHE II.

Great Thebes, my sons ! is now no more ; 170
She falls, and ne'er again shall rise ;
Naught can her health or strength restore ;
The mighty nation sinks, she droops, she dies.
Stripp'd of her fruits behold the barren earth :
The half-form'd infant struggles for a birth ; 175
The mother sinks, unequal to her pain :
While, quick as birds in airy circles fly,
Or lightnings from an angry sky,
Crowds press on crowds to Pluto's dark domain.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Behold, what heaps of wretches slain, 180
 Unburied, unlamented lie ;
 Nor parents now nor friends remain
 To grace their deaths with pious obsequy ;
 The aged matron and the blooming wife,
 Clang to the altars, sue for added life. 185
 With sighs and groans united, Pæans rise ;
 Re-echoed still doth great Apollo's name
 Their sorrows and their wants proclaim
 Frequent to him ascends the sacrifice.

STROPHE III.

Haste, then, Minerva ! beauteous maid ! 190
 Descend in this afflictive hour ;
 Haste to thy dying people's aid ;
 Drive hence this baneful, this destructive power,
 Who comes not arm'd with hostile sword or shield,
 Yet strews with many a corse the ensanguined field.
 To Amphitrite's wide-extending bed, 196
 O ! drive me, goddess, from thy favourite land ;
 Or let him, by thy dread command,
 Bury in Thracian waves his ignominious head

ANTISTROPHE III.

Father of all, immortal Jove ! 200
 O ! now thy fiery terrors send ;
 From thy dreadful stores above
 Let lightnings blast him, and let thunders rend.
 And thou, O Lydian king ! thy aid impart ;
 Send from thy golden bow the unerring dart ; 205
 Smile, chaste Diana ! on this loved abode,
 While Theban Bacchus joins the maddening throng.
 O god of wine, and mirth, and song !
 Now with thy torch, destroy the base, inglorious
 god. [Exeunt.

209 Bacchus is always described with torches : probably in remembrance of his birth, as being born in flames, when his mother Semele was consumed by Jove's lightning.

ACT II.

ŒDIPUS, CHORUS, *the People assembled.*

ŒDI. Your prayers are heard; and, if you will
obey 210

Your king, and hearken to his words, you soon
Shall find relief: myself will heal your woes.
I was a stranger to the dreadful deed,
A stranger ev'n to the report till now;
And yet, without some traces of the crime, 215
I should not urge this matter; therefore hear me.

I speak to all the citizens of Thebes,
Myself a citizen; observe me well:
If any know the murderer of Laius,
Let him reveal it; I command you all; 220
But if, restrain'd by dread punishment,
He hide the secret, let him fear no more;
For naught but exile shall attend the crime,
Whene'er confess'd: if by a foreign hand
The horrid deed was done, who points him out 225
Commands our thanks, and meets a sure reward;
But if there be who knows the murderer,
And yet conceals him from us, mark his fate,
Which here I do pronounce; let none receive,
Throughout my kingdom, none hold converse with
him, 230

Nor offer prayer, nor sprinkle o'er his head
The sacred cup; let him be driven from all,
By all abandon'd, and by all accursed;
For so the Delphic oracle declared:
And therefore to the gods I pay this duty, 235
And to the dead. O! may the guilty wretch,
Whether alone, or by his impious friends

231 Before the sacrifice, it was customary for those who partook of it to wash their hands together in the lustral water, with which they were afterward sprinkled by the priests, by way of purification; to be denied this, was always considered as a mark of guilt and infamy.

Assisted, he perform'd the horrid deed,
 Denied the common benefits of nature,
 Wear out a painful life ! and, O ! if here, 240
 Within my palace I conceal the traitor,
 On me and mine alight the vengeful curse !
 To you, my people ! I commit the care
 Of this important business ; 'tis my cause,
 The cause of Heaven, and your expiring country.
 Ev'n if the god had naught declared, to leave 246
 This crime unexpiated were most ungrateful :
 He was the best of kings, the best of men ;
 That sceptre now is mine which Laius bore :
 His wife is mine ; so would his children be, 250
 Did any live ; and therefore am I bound,
 Ev'n as he were my father, to revenge him.
 Yes, I will try to find this murderer ;
 I owe it to the son of Labdacus,
 To Polydorus, Cadmus, and the race 255
 Of great Agenor. O ! if yet there are
 Who will not join me in the pious deed ;
 From such may Earth withhold her annual store,
 And barren be their bed, their life most wretched,
 And their death cruel as the pestilence 260
 That wastes our city ; but on you, my Thebans !
 Who wish us fair success, may Justice smile
 Propitious, and the gods for ever bless !
 CHO. O king ! thy imprecation unappall'd
 I hear, and join thee, guiltless of the crime, 265
 Nor knowing who committed it. The god
 Alone, who gave the oracle, must clear
 Its doubtful sense, and point out the offender.
 ŒDI. 'Tis true ; but who shall force the powers
 divine
 To speak their hidden purpose ?
 CHO. One thing more, 270
 If I might speak.
 ŒDI. Say on, whate'er thy mind
 Shall dictate to thee.
 CHO. As among the gods

All-knowing Phœbus, so to mortal men
Doth sage Tiresias in foreknowledge sure
Shine forth pre-eminent : perchance his aid 275
Might much avail us.

Œdi. Creon did suggest
The same expedient, and by his advice
Twice have I sent for this Tiresias ; much
I wonder that he comes not.

Cho. 'Tis most fitting
We do consult him ; for the idle tales 280
Which rumour spreads are not to be regarded.

Œdi. What are those tales ? for naught should
we despise.

Cho. 'Tis said, some travellers did attack the
king.

Œdi. It is : but still no proof appears.

Cho. And yet,
If it be so, thy dreadful execration 285
Will force the guilty to confess.

Œdi. O no !
Who fears not to commit the crime will ne'er
Be frightened at the curse that follows it.

Cho. Behold, he comes, who will discover all !
The holy prophet, see ! They lead him hither : 290
He knows the truth, and will reveal it to us.

Enter TIRESIAS.

Œdi. O sage Tiresias ! thou, who knowest all
That can be known, the things of heaven above
And earth below ; whose mental eye beholds,
Blind as thou art, the state of dying Thebes, 295
And weeps her fate ; to thee we look for aid ;
On thee alone for safety we depend.
This answer, which perchance thou hast not heard,
Apollo gave : The plague, he said, should cease,
When those who murder'd Laius were discover'd,
And paid the forfeit of their crime by death 301
Or banishment. O ! do not then conceal
Aught that thy art prophetic, from the flight

With those he loves, unconscious of his guilt,
Is yet most guilty.

ŒDI. Darest thou utter more,
And hope for pardon?

TIR. Yes, if there be strength
In sacred truth.

ŒDI. But truth dwells not in thee :
Thy body and thy mind are dark alike, 365
For both are blind ; thy every sense is lost.

TIR. Thou dost upbraid me with the loss of that
For which thyself ere long shall meet reproach
From every tongue.

ŒDI. Thou blind and impious traitor !
Thy darkness is thy safeguard, or this hour 370
Had been thy last.

TIR. It is not in my fate
To fall by thee ; Apollo guards his priest.

ŒDI. Was this the tale of Creon, or thy own ?

TIR. Creon is guiltless, and the crime is thine.

ŒDI. O riches, power, dominion, and thou far 375
Above them all, the best of human blessings,
Excelling wisdom, how doth envy love
To follow and oppress you ! This fair kingdom,
Which, by the nation's choice and not my own,
I here possess, Creon, my faithful friend 380
(For such I thought him once), would now wrest
from me,

And hath suborn'd this vile impostor here,
This wand'ring hypocrite, of sharpest sight
When interest prompts, but ignorant and blind
When fools consult him. Tell me, prophet ! where
Was all thy art, when the abhorred sphinx 385
Alarm'd our city ? Wherefore did not then
Thy wisdom save us ? Then the man divine
Was wanting ; but thy birds refused their omens ;
Thy god was silent : then came Œdipus, 390
This poor, unlearned, uninstructed sage,
Who not from birds uncertain omens drew,
But by his own sagacious mind explored

'The hidden mystery ; and now thou comest
To cast me from the throne my wisdom gain'd, 395
And share with Creon my divided empire.
But you should both lament your ill-got power,
You and your bold compeer ; for thee, this moment,
But that I bear respect unto thy age,
I'd make thee rue thy execrable purpose. 400

CHO. You both are angry, therefore both to blame :
Much rather should you join, with friendly zeal
And mutual ardour, to explore the will
Of all-deciding Heaven.

TIR. What though thou rulest
O'er Thebes despotic, we are equal here ; 405
I am Apollo's subject, and not thine ;
Nor want I Creon to protect me. No ;
I tell thee, king ! this blind Tiresias tells thee,
Seeing thou seest not, know'st not where thou art,
What, or with whom. Canst thou inform me who
Thy parents are, and what thy horrid crimes 411
'Gainst thy own race, the living and the dead ?
A father's and a mother's curse attend thee.
Soon shall their furies drive thee from the land,
And leave thee dark like me : what mountain then,
Or conscious shore, shall not return the groans 416
Of Œdipus, and echo to his woes ?

When thou shalt look on the detested bed,
And in that haven where thou hopest to rest, 419
Shalt meet with storm and tempest ; then what ills
Shall fall on thee and thine ! Now vent thy rage
On old Tiresias and the guiltless Creon :
We shall be soon avenged, for ne'er did Heaven
Cut off a wretch so base, so vile as thou art. 424

ŒDI. Must I bear this from thee ? Away, begone !
Home, villain, home !

TIR. I did not come to thee
Unsent for.

ŒDI. Had I thought thou wouldst have thus
Insulted me, I had not call'd thee hither.

SOPH.—Y

TIR. Perhaps thou hold'st Tiresias as a fool
And madman; but thy parents thought me wise.

ŒDI. My parents, saidst thou? Speak! who were
my parents? 431

TIR. This day, that gives thee life, shall give thee
death.

ŒDI. Still dark, and still perplexing are the words
Thou utter'st.

TIR. 'Tis thy business to unriddle,
And therefore thou canst best interpret them. 435

ŒDI. Thou dost reproach me for my virtues.

TIR. They,
And thy good fortune, have undone thee.

ŒDI. Since
I sav'd the city, I'm content.

TIR. Farewell.
Boy, lead me hence.

ŒDI. Away with him, for here
His presence but disturbs us; being gone, 440
We shall be happier.

TIR. Œdipus! I go;
But first inform thee (for I fear thee not)
Wherefore I came: know, then, I came to tell thee,
The man thou seek'st, the man on whom thou
pour'dst

Thy execrations, ev'n the murderer 445
Of Laius, now is here; a seeming stranger,
And yet a Theban. He shall suffer soon

For all his crimes: from light and affluence driven
To penury and darkness, poor and blind,
Propp'd on his staff, and from his native land 450
Expell'd, I see him in a foreign clime

A helpless wanderer; to his sons at once
A father and a brother; child and husband
Of her from whom he sprang. Adulterous,
Incestuous parricide! now fare thee well; 455

432 That is, "This day, which shall discover who thy pa-
rents are that gave thee life, shall also, by that discovery, cause
thy death, when thou shalt be found the murderer of thy father."

Go, learn the truth ; and, if it be not so,
Say I have ne'er deserved the name of prophet.

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

When will the guilty wretch appear,
Whom Delphi's sacred oracle demands ;
Author of crimes too black for mortal ear, 460
Dipping in royal blood his sacrilegious hands ?
Swift as the storm by rapid whirlwinds driven,
Quick let him fly the impending wrath of Heaven ;
For lo, the angry son of Jove,
Arm'd with red lightnings from above, 465
Pursues the murderer with immortal hate,
And round him spreads the snares of unrelenting
fate.

ANTISTROPHE I.

From steep Parnassus' rocky cave,
Cover'd with snow, came forth the dread command ;
Apollo thence his sacred mandate gave, 470
To search the man of blood through every land.
Silent and sad the weary wanderer roves
O'er pathless rocks and solitary groves,
Hoping to 'scape the wrath divine
Denounced from great Apollo's shrine : 475
Vain hopes to 'scape the fate by Heaven decreed
For vengeance hovers still o'er his devoted head.

STROPHE II.

Tiresias, famed for wisdom's lore,
Hath dreadful ills to Œdipus divined ;
And as his words mysterious I explore, 480
Unnumber'd doubts perplex my anxious mind :
Now raised by hope, and now with fears oppress'd,
Sorrow and joy alternate fill my breast.
How should these hapless kings be foes,
When never strife between them rose ? 485
Or why should Laius, slain by hands unknown,
Bring foul disgrace on Polybus' unhappy soul ?

ANTISTROPHE II.

From Phœbus and all-seeing Jove
 Naught can be hid of actions here below ;
 But earthly prophets may deceitful prove, 490
 And little more than other mortals know.
 Though much in wisdom man doth man excel,
 In all that's human error still must dwell.
 Could he commit the bloody deed,
 Who from the sphinx our city freed ? 495
 O no ! he never shed the guiltless blood ;
 The sphinx declares him wise, and innocent, and
 good. [*Exeunt.*]

ACT III.

CREON, CHORUS.

CRE. O citizens ! with grief I hear your king
 Hath blasted the fair fame of guiltless Creon,
 And most unjustly brands me with a crime 500
 My soul abhors. While desolation spreads
 On every side, and universal ruin
 Hangs o'er the land, if I in word or deed
 Could join to swell the woes of hapless Thebes,
 I were unworthy, nay, I would not wish 505
 To live another day. 'Alas, my friends !
 Thus to be deem'd a traitor to my country,
 To you, my fellow-citizens, to all
 That hear me ; O, 'tis infamy and shame !
 I cannot, will not bear it.

CHO. 'Twas the effect 510
 Of sudden anger only ; what he said,
 But could not think.

CRE. Who told him I suborn'd
 The prophet to speak falsely ? What could raise
 This vile suspicion ?

CHO. Such he had, but whence
 I know not.

CRE. Talk'd he thus with firm composure 515
 And confidence of mind ?

CHO. I cannot say :
 'Tis not for me to know the thoughts of kings,
 Or judge their actions : but, behold, he comes.

Enter ŒDIPUS.

ŒDI. Ha ! Creon here ? And darest thou thus
 approach 519
 My palace ? thou, who wouldst have murder'd me,
 And taken my kingdom ? By the gods, I ask thee
 (Answer me ! traitor), didst thou think me fool
 Or coward, that I could not see thy arts,
 Or had not strength to vanquish them ? What mad-
 ness,
 What strange infatuation, led thee on, 525
 Without or force or friends, to grasp at empire,
 Which only their united force can give ?
 What wert thou doing ?

CRE. Hear what I shall answer,
 Then judge impartial.

ŒDI. Thou canst talk it well,
 But I shall ne'er attend to thee ; thy guilt 530
 Is plain ; thou art my deadliest foe.

CRE. But hear
 What I shall urge.

ŒDI. Say not thou art innocent.

CRE. If self-opinion, void of reason, seem
 Conviction to thee, know, thou err'st most grossly.

ŒDI. And thou more grossly, if thou think'st to
 pass 535
 Unpunish'd for this injury to thy friend.

CRE. I should not, were I guilty ; but what crime
 Have I committed ? Tell me.

ŒDI. Wert not thou
 The man who urged me to require the aid
 Of your all-knowing prophet ?

CRE. True, I was ; 540
 I did persuade you : so I would again.

ŒDI. How long is it since Laius—

CRE.

Laius ? what ?

ŒDI. Since Laius fell by hands unknown ?

CRE. A long,
Long tract of years.

ŒDI. Was this Tiresias then
A prophet ?

CRE. Ay, in wisdom and in fame, 545
As now, excelling.

ŒDI. Did he then say aught
Concerning me ?

CRE. I never heard he did.

ŒDI. Touching this murder, did you ne'er inquire
Who were the authors ?

CRE. Doubtless ; but in vain.

ŒDI. Why did not the same prophet then inform
you ? 550

CRE. I know not that, and when I'm ignorant
I'm always silent.

ŒDI. What concerns thyself
At least thou know'st, and therefore shouldst de-
clare it.

CRE. What is it ? speak ; and if 'tis in my power,
I'll answer thee.

ŒDI. Thou know'st, if this Tiresias 555
Had not combined with thee, he would not thus
Accuse me as the murderer of Laius.

CRE. What he declares thou best canst tell ; of
me,
What thou requirest, myself am yet to learn.

ŒDI. Go, learn it, then ; but ne'er shalt thou dis-
cover 560

That Œdipus is guilty.

CRE. Art not thou
My sister's husband ?

ŒDI. Granted.

CRE. Join'd with her,
Thou rulest o'er Thebes.

ŒDI. 'Tis true, and all she asks
Most freely do I give her.

CRE. Is not Creon
In honour next to you ?

Edi. They art, and therefore 565
The more ungrateful.

CREON. Hear what I shall plead,
And thou wilt never think so : tell me, prince,
Is there a man who would prefer a throne,
With all its dangers, to an equal rank
In peace and safety ? I am not of those 570
Who choose the name of king before the power ;
Fools only make such wishes ; I have all
From thee, and fearless I enjoy it all.
Had I the sceptre, often must I act
Against my will. Know, then, I am not yet 575
So void of sense and reason as to quit
A real 'vantage for a seeming good.
Am I not happy ? am I not revered,
Embraced, and loved by all ? To me they come
Who want thy favour, and by me acquire it : 580
What then should Creon wish for ? Shall he leave
All this for empire ? Bad desires corrupt
The fairest mind : I never entertain'd
A thought so vile, nor would I lend my aid
To forward such base purposes. But go 585
To Delphi ; ask the sacred oracle
If I have spoke the truth : if there you find
That with the prophet I conspired, destroy
The guilty Creon : not thy voice alone
Shall then condemn me, for myself will join 590
In the just sentence ; but accuse me not
On weak suspicion's most uncertain test.
Justice would never call the wicked good,
Or brand fair virtue with the name of vice,
Unmerited : to cast away a friend 595
Faithful and just, is to deprive ourselves
Of life and being, which we hold most dear :
But time, and time alone, revealeth all ;
That only shows the good man's excellence :
A day sufficeth to unmask the wicked. 600

CHO. O king! his caution merits your regard;
Who judge in haste do seldom judge aright.

ŒDI. When they are quick who plot against my
life,
'Tis fit I should be quick in my defence :
If I am tame and silent, all they wish 605
Will soon be done, and Œdipus must fall.

CRE. What wouldst thou have? my banishment?

ŒDI. Thy death.

CRE. But first inform me wherefore I should die.

ŒDI. Dost thou rebel then? Wilt thou not submit?

CRE. Not when I see thee thus deceived.

ŒDI. 'Tis fit 610

I should defend my own.

CRE. And so should I.

ŒDI. Thou art a traitor.

CRE. What, if I should prove

I am not so?

ŒDI. A king must be obey'd

CRE. Not if his orders are unjust.

ŒDI. O Thebes!

O citizens!

CRE. I too can call on Thebes: 615

She is my country.

CHO. O! no more, my lords!

For, see, Jocasta comes in happiest hour
To end your contest.

Enter JOCASTA.

Joc. Whence this sudden tumult?

O princes! is this well, at such a time
With idle broils to multiply the woes 620
Of wretched Thebes? Home, home, for shame;
nor thus

With private quarrel swell the public ruin.

CRE. Sister! thy husband hath most basely used
me;

He threatens me with banishment or death.

ŒDI. I do confess it; for he did conspire, 625
With vile and wicked arts, against my life.

CRE. O! may I never prosper, but, accursed,
Unpitied, perish if I ever did!

Joc. Believe him, Œdipus! reverè the gods
Whom he contests, if thou dost love Jocasta: 630
Thy subjects beg it of thee.

CHO. Hear, O king!
Consider, we entreat thee.

ŒDI. What wouldst have?
Think you I'll e'er submit to him?

CHO. Revere
His character, his oath, both pleading for him.

ŒDI. But know you what you ask?

CHO. We do.

ŒDI. What is it? 635

CHO. We ask thee to believe a guiltless friend,
Nor cast him forth dishonour'd thus, on slight
Suspicion's weak surmise.

ŒDI. Requesting this,
You do request my banishment or death.

CHO. No, by yon leader of the heavenly host, 640
The immortal sun, I had not such a thought:
I only felt for Thebes' distressful state,
And would not have it by domestic strife
Imbitter'd thus.

ŒDI. Why, let him then depart:
If Œdipus must die, or leave his country 645
For shameful exile, be it so: I yield
To thy request, not his; for hateful still
Shall Creon ever be.

CRE. Thy stubborn soul
Bends with reluctance, and, when anger fires it,
Is terrible; but natures form'd like thine 650
Are their own punishment.

ŒDI. Wilt thou not hence?
Wilt not be gone?

CRE. I go: thou know'st me not;
But these will do me justice. [Exit Creon.

CHO. Princess! now
Persuade him to retire.

Joc. First let me know
The cause of this dissension.

Cho. From reports 655
Uncertain, and suspicions most injurious,
The quarrel rose.

Joc. Was the accusation mutual ?

Cho. It was.

Joc. What follow'd then ?

Cho. Ask me no more ;
Enough's already known : we'll not repeat
The woes of hapless Thebes.

Œdi. You are all blind, 660
Insensible, unjust ; you love me not,
Yet boast your piety.

Cho. I said before,
Again I say, that not to love my king
Ev'n as myself would mark me for the worst
• Of men ; for thou didst save expiring Thebes. 665
O ! rise once more, protect, preserve thy country !

Joc. O king ! inform me, whence this strange dis-
sension ?

Œdi. I'll tell thee, my Jocasta ! (for thou know'st
The love I bear thee), what this wicked Creon
Did artfully devise against me.

Joc. Speak it, 670
If he indeed be guilty.

Œdi. Creon says
That I did murder Laius.

Joc. Spake he this
As knowing it himself, or from another ?

Œdi. He had suborn'd that evil-working priest,
And sharpens every tongue against his king. 675

Joc. Let not a fear perplex thee, Œdipus !
Mortals know nothing of futurity,
And these prophetic seers are all impostors ;
I'll prove it to thee. Know, then, Laius once,
Not from Apollo, but his priests, received 680
An oracle, which said it was decreed
He should be slain by his own son, the offspring

Of Laius and Jocasta; yet he fell,
 By strangers, murder'd (for so fame reports)
 By robbers in the place where three ways meet. 685
 A son was born; but ere three days had pass'd,
 The infant's feet were bored; a servant took,
 And left him on the pathless mountain's top,
 To perish there: thus Phœbus ne'er decreed
 That he should kill his father, or that Laius 690
 (Which much he fear'd) should by his son be slain.
 Such is the truth of oracles: henceforth
 Regard them not. What Heaven would have us
 know

It can with ease unfold, and will reveal it.

ŒDI. What thou hast said, Jocasta! much disturbs me: 695

I tremble at it.

Joc. Wherefore shouldst thou fear?

ŒDI. Methought I heard thee say, Laius was slain
 Where three ways meet.

Joc. 'Twas so reported then,
 And is so still.

ŒDI. Where happened the misfortune?

Joc. In Phocis, where the roads unite that lead
 To Delphi and to Daulia.

ŒDI. How long since? 701

Joc. A little time ere you began to reign
 O'er Thebes, we heard it.

ŒDI. O almighty Jove!
 What wilt thou do with me?

Joc. Why talk'st thou thus?

ŒDI. Ask me no more; but tell me of this Laius,
 What was his age and stature?

Joc. He was tall; 706
 His hairs just turning to the silver hue;
 His form not much unlike thy own.

ŒDI. O me!
 Sure I have call'd down curses on myself
 Unknowing.

Joc. Ha! what say'st thou, *Œdipus*? 710
I tremble while I look on thee.

Œdi. O! much
I fear, the prophet saw too well: but say,
One thing will make it clear.

Joc. I dread to hear it;
Yet speak, and I will tell thee.

Œdi. Went he forth
With few attendants, or a numerous train, 715
In kingly pomp?

Joc. They were but five in all,
The herald with them; but one chariot there,
Which carried *Laius*.

Œdi. O! 'tis but too plain.
Who brought the news?

Joc. A servant, who alone
Escaped with life.

Œdi. That servant, is he here? 720

Joc. O no: his master slain, when he return'd,
And saw thee on the throne of Thebes, with prayer
Most earnest he besought me to dismiss him,
That he might leave this city, where he wish'd
No longer to be seen, but to retire, 725
And feed my flocks: I granted his request:
For that and more his honest services
Had merited.

Œdi. I beg he may be sent for
Immediately.

Joc. He shall; but wherefore is it?

Œdi. I fear thou hast said too much, and there-
fore wish 730
To see him.

Joc. He shall come: but, O my lord!
Am I not worthy to be told the cause
Of this distress?

Œdi. Thou art, and I will tell thee.
Thou art my hope; to whom should I impart
My sorrows but to thee? Know then, *Jocasta*! 735
I am the son of *Polybus*, who reigns
At *Corinth*, and the *Dorian Merope*

His queen ; there long I held the foremost rank,
 Honour'd and happy, when a strange event
 (For strange it was, though little meriting 740
 The deep concern I felt) alarm'd me much.
 A drunken reveller at a feast proclaim'd
 That I was only the supposed son
 Of Corinth's king. Scarce could I bear that day
 The vile reproach ; the next, I sought my parents,
 And ask'd of them the truth ; they too, enraged, 746
 Resented much the base indignity.
 I liked their tender warmth, but still I felt
 A secret anguish ; and, unknown to them,
 Sought out the Pythian oracle, in vain. 750
 Touching my parents, nothing could I learn ;
 But dreadful were the miseries it denounced
 Against me : 'twas my fate, Apollo said,
 To wed my mother, to produce a race
 Accursed and abhorr'd, and last to slay 755
 My father who begat me ;—sad decree !
 Lest I should e'er fulfil the dire prediction,
 Instant I fled from Corinth, by the stars
 Guiding my hapless journey, to the place
 Where thou report'st this wretched king was slain.
 But I will tell thee the whole truth : at length, 761
 I came to where the three ways meet ; when lo !
 A herald, with another man, like him
 Whom thou describest, and in a chariot, met me.
 Both strove with violence to drive me back. 765
 Enraged, I struck the charioteer, when straight,
 As I advanced, the old man saw, and twice
 Smote me on the head ; but dearly soon repaid
 The insult on me : from his chariot roll'd,
 Prone on the earth, beneath my staff he fell, 770
 And instantly expired ; the attendant train
 All shared his fate. If this unhappy stranger
 And Laius be the same, lives there a wretch
 So cursed, so hateful to the gods as I am ?
 Nor citizen nor alien must receive, 775
 Or converse or communion hold with me,

SOPH.—Z

But drive me forth with infamy and shame :
 The dreadful curse pronounced with my own lips
 Shall soon o'ertake me : I have stain'd the bed
 Of him whom I had murder'd ; am I then 780
 Aught but pollution ? If I fly from hence,
 The bed of incest meets me, and I go
 To slay my father Polybus, the best,
 The tenderest parent ; this must be the work 784
 Of some malignant power. Ye righteous gods !
 Let me not see that day, but rest in death,
 Rather than suffer such calamity.

CHO. O king ! we pity thy distress : but wait
 With patience his arrival, and despair not. 789

ŒDI. That shepherd is my only hope : Jocasta !
 Would he were here !

Joc. Suppose he were ; what then ?
 What wouldst thou do ?

ŒDI. I'll tell thee ; if he says
 The same as thou dost, I am safe, and guiltless.

Joc. What said I then ?

ŒDI. Thou saidst, he did report
 Laius was slain by robbers : if 'tis true 795
 He fell by numbers, I am innocent,
 For I was unattended ; if but one
 Attack'd and slew him, doubtless I am he.

Joc. Be satisfied, it must be as he first
 Reported it : he cannot change the tale. 800
 Not I alone, but the whole city heard it :
 Or grant he should, the oracle was ne'er
 Fulfill'd ; for Phœbus said, Jocasta's son
 Should slay his father ; that could never be,
 For, O ! Jocasta's son long since is dead. 805
 He could not murder Laius ; therefore, never
 Will I attend to prophecies again.

ŒDI. Right, my Jocasta ! but, I beg thee, send
 And fetch this shepherd ; do not fail.

Joc. I will,
 This moment ; come, my lord ! let us go in ; 810
 I will do nothing but what pleases thee. [*Exeunt.*]

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

Grant me, henceforth, ye powers divine !
 In virtue's purest paths to tread ;
 In every word, in every deed, !
 May sanctity of manners ever shine ; 815
 Obedient to the laws of Jove,
 The laws descended from above ;
 Which, not like those by feeble mortals given,
 Buried in dark oblivion lie,
 Or, worn by time, decay and die : 820
 But bloom eternal like their native heaven !

ANTISTROPHE I.

Pride first gave birth to tyranny :
 That hateful vice, insulting Pride,
 When, every human power defied,
 She lifts to glory's height her votary ; 825
 Soon stumbling, from her tottering throne
 She throws the wretched victim down.
 But may the god, indulgent, hear my prayer,
 That god whom humbly I adore :
 O ! may he smile on Thebes once more, 830
 And take its wretched monarch to his care !

STROPHE II.

Perish the impious and profane,
 Who, void of reverential fear,
 Nor justice nor the laws revere ;
 Who leave their god for pleasure or for gain ; 835
 Who swell by fraud their ill-got store ;
 Who rob the wretched and the poor.
 If vice, unpunish'd, virtue's meed obtain,
 Who shall refrain the impetuous soul,
 The rebel passions who control, 840
 Or wherefore do I lead this choral train ?

ANTISTROPHE II.

No more to Delphi's sacred shrine
 Need we with incense now repair ;
 No more shall Phocis hear our prayer,
 Nor fair Olympia see her rites divine ; 845

If oracles no longer prove
 The power of Phœbus and of Jove.
 Great lord of all ! from thy eternal throne
 Behold how impious men defame
 Thy loved Apollo's honour'd name : 850
 O ! guard his rights, and vindicate thy own. [*Exeunt.*]

ACT IV.

JOCASTA, CHORUS.

Joc. Sages and rulers of the land ! I come
 To seek the altars of the gods, and there
 With incense and oblations to appease
 Offended Heaven. My Œdipus, alas ! 855
 No longer wise and prudent, as you all
 Remember once he was, with present things
 Compares the past, nor judges like himself :
 Unnumber'd cares perplex his anxious mind,
 And every tale awakes new terrors in him. 860
 Vain is my counsel, for he hears me not.
 First then to thee, O Phœbus ! (for thou still
 Art near to help the wretched), we appeal,
 And suppliant beg thee now to grant thy aid
 Propitious : deep is our distress ; for, O ! 865
 We see our pilot sinking at the helm,
 And much already fear the vessel lost.

Enter SHEPHERD from Corinth.

SHEP. Can you instruct me, strangers ! which way
 lies
 The palace of king Œdipus ? himself
 I would most gladly see. Can you inform me ? 870
 CHO. This is the palace ; he is now within ;
 Thou seest his queen before thee.

SHEP. Ever bless'd,
 And happy with the happy mayst thou live !
 Joc. Stranger ! the same good wish to thee, for
 well

Thy words deserve it: but say, wherefore comest thou, 875

And what's thy news?

SHEP. To thee, and to thy husband,
Pleasure and joy!

Joc. What pleasure? and whence art thou?

SHEP. From Corinth: to be brief, I bring thee tidings

Of good and evil.

Joc. Ha! what mean thy words?
Ambiguous?

SHEP. Know, then, if report say true, 880
The Isthmian people will choose Œdipus
Their sovereign.

Joc. Is not Polybus their king?

SHEP. No; Polybus is dead.

Joc. What say'st thou? dead?

SHEP. If I speak falsely, may death seize on me!

Joc. [*to one of her Attendants.*] Why fliest thou not
to tell thy master? Hence! 885

What are you now, you oracles divine?
Where is your truth? The fearful Œdipus
From Corinth fled, lest he should slay the king,
This Polybus, who perish'd, not by him,
But by the hand of Heaven.

Enter ŒDIPUS.

ŒDI. My dear Jocasta! 890
Why hast thou call'd me hither?

Joc. Hear this man;
And when thou hear'st him, mark what faith is due
To your revered oracles.

ŒDI. What is he,
And what doth he report?

881 The people of Corinth; so called from the famous isthmus there.

Joc. He comes from Corinth,
And says, thy father, Polybus, is dead. 895

Œdi. What say'st thou, stranger? Speak to me,
O! speak.

SHEP. If touching this thou first desirest my
answer,
Know, he is dead.

Œdi. How died he? say, by treason,
Or some disease?

SHEP. Alas! a little force
Will lay to rest the weary limbs of age. 900

Œdi. Distemper then did kill him?

SHEP. That in part,
And part a length of years that wore him down.

Œdi. Now, my Jocasta, who shall henceforth
trust

To prophecies, and seers, and clamorous birds
With their vain omens? they who had decreed 905
That I should kill my father? He, thou seest,
Beneath the earth lies buried, while I live
In safety here, and guiltless of his blood:
Unless, perhaps, sorrow for the loss of me
Shorten'd his days, thus only could I kill 910
My father; but he's gone, and to the shades
Hath carried with him those vain oracles
Of fancied ill, no longer worth my care.

Joc. Did I not say it would be thus?

Œdi. Thou didst;
But I was full of fears.

Joc. Henceforth, no more 915
Indulge them.

Œdi. But my mother's bed—that still
Must be avoided: I must fly from that.

Joc. Why should man fear, whom chance, and
chance alone,
Doth ever rule? Foreknowledge all is vain,
And can determine nothing: therefore best 920
It is to live as fancy leads, at large,
Uncurb'd and only subject to our will.

Fear not thy mother's bed : ofttimes in dreams
Have men committed incest ; but his life
Will ever be most happy who contemns 925
Such idle phantoms.

ŒDI. Thou wert right, Jocasta !
Did not my mother live ; but as it is,
Spite of thy words, I must be anxious still.

Joc. Think on thy father's death ; it is a light
To guide thee here.

ŒDI. It is so ; yet I fear, 930
While she survives him.

SHEP. Who is it you mean ?
What woman fear you ?

ŒDI. Merope, the wife
Of Polybus.

SHEP. And wherefore fear you her ?

ŒDI. Know, stranger, a most dreadful oracle
Concerning her affrights me.

SHEP. May I know it, 935
Or must it be reveal'd to none but thee ?

ŒDI. O, no, I'll tell thee : Phœbus hath declared
That Œdipus should stain his mother's bed,
And dip his hands in his own father's blood ;
Wherefore I fled from Corinth, and lived here, 940
In happiness indeed ; but still thou know'st
It is a blessing to behold our parents,
And that I had not.

SHEP. Was it for this cause
Thou wert an exile then ?

ŒDI. It was ; I fear'd 944
That I might one day prove my father's murderer.

SHEP. What if I come, O king ! to banish hence
Thy terrors, and restore thy peace ?

ŒDI. O stranger !
Couldst thou do this, I would reward thee nobly.

SHEP. Know, then, for this I came ; I came to
serve,
And make thee happy.

ÆDL. But I will not go 950
Back to my parents.

SHEP. Son, I see thou know'st not
What thou art doing.

ÆDL. Wherefore think'st thou so ?
By Heaven, I beg thee then do thou instruct me.

SHEP. If thou didst fly from Corinth for this
cause—

ÆDL. Apollo's dire predictions still affright me. 955

SHEP. Fear'st thou pollution from thy parents ?

ÆDL. That,

And that alone, I dread.

SHEP. Thy fears are vain.

ÆDL. Not if they are my parents.

SHEP. Polybus

Was not akin to thee.

ÆDL. What say'st thou ? Speak ;
Say, was not Polybus my father ?

SHEP. No ; 960
No more than he is mine.

ÆDL. Why call me then
His son ?

SHEP. Because long since I gave thee to him :
He did receive thee from these hands.

ÆDL. Indeed !
And could he love another's child so well ?

SHEP. He had no children ; that persuaded him 965
To take and keep thee.

ÆDL. Didst thou buy me then,
Or am I thine, and must I call thee father ?

SHEP. I found thee in Cithæron's woody vale.

ÆDL. What brought thee there ?

SHEP. I came to feed my flocks
On the green mountain's side.

ÆDL. It seems thou wert 970
A wandering shepherd.

SHEP. Thy deliverer,
I saved thee from destruction.

ŒDI. How! what then
Had happen'd to me?

SHEP. Thy own feet will best
Inform thee of that circumstance.

ŒDI. Alas!
Why call'st thou to remembrance a misfortune 975
Of so long date?

SHEP. 'Twas I who loosed the tendons
Of thy bored feet.

ŒDI. It seems, in infancy,
I suffer'd much then.

SHEP. To this incident
Thou owest thy name.

ŒDI. My father or my mother,
Who did it? Know'st thou?

SHEP. He who gave thee to me
Must tell thee that.

ŒDI. Then from another's hand 981
Thou didst receive me?

SHEP. Ay, another shepherd.

ŒDI. Who was he? Canst thou recollect?

SHEP. 'Twas one,
At least so called, of Laius' family.

ŒDI. Laius, who ruled at Thebes?

SHEP. The same: this man
Was shepherd to King Laius.

ŒDI. Lives he still? 986
And could I see him?

SHEP. [*pointing to the Chorus.*] Some of these,
perhaps,

His countrymen, may give you information.

ŒDI. [*to the Chorus.*] O! speak, my friends! if
any of you know

This shepherd; whether still he lives at Thebes, 990
Or in some neighbouring country; tell me quick,
For it concerns us near.

979 Œdipus signifies, in the Greek, "swelled foot;" taking
his name from the sore and swelling of his foot.

CHO. It must be he
Whom thou didst lately send for ; but the queen
Can best inform thee.

ŒDI. Know'st thou, my Jocasta !
Whether the man whom thou didst order hither, 995
And whom the shepherd speaks of, be the same ?

Joc. Whom meant he ? for I know not. Œdipus !
Think not so deeply of this thing.

ŒDI. Good Heaven
Forbid, Jocasta ! I should now neglect
To clear my birth, when thus the path is mark'd
And open to me.

Joc. Do not, by the gods 1001
I beg thee, do not, if thy life be dear,
Make farther search, for I have felt enough
Already from it.

ŒDI. Rest thou satisfied :
Were I descended from a race of slaves, 1005
'Twould not dishonour thee.

Joc. Yet hear me ; do not,
Once more, I beg thee, do not search this matter.

ŒDI. I will not be persuaded : I must search,
And find it too.

Joc. I know it best, and best
Advise thee.

ŒDI. That advice perplexes more. 1010

Joc. O ! would to Heaven that thou mayst never
know

Or who or whence thou art !

ŒDI. [*to the Attendant.*] Let some one fetch
That shepherd quick, and leave this woman here
To glory in her high descent.

Joc. Alas !
Unhappy Œdipus ! that word alone 1015
I now can speak : remember, 'tis my last.

[*Exit JOCASTA.*]

CHO. Why fled the queen in such disorder hence ?
Sorely distress'd she seemed, and much I fear
Her silence bodes some sad event.

ŒDI.

Whate'er

May come of that, I am resolved to know 1020
 The secret of my birth, how mean soever
 It chance to prove: perhaps her sex's pride
 May make her blush to find I was not born
 Of noble parents; but I call myself
 The son of Fortune, my indulgent mother, 1025
 Whom I shall never be ashamed to own.
 The kindred months, that are, like me, her children;
 The years, that roll obedient to her will,—
 Have raised me from the lowest state to power
 And splendour; wherefore, being what I am, 1030
 I need not fear the knowledge of my birth.

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

If my prophetic soul doth well divine,
 Ere on thy brow to-morrow's sun shall shine,
 Cithæron! thou the mystery shalt unfold:
 The doubtful Œdipus, no longer blind, 1035
 Shall soon his country and his father find,
 And all the story of his birth be told:
 Then shall we in grateful lays,
 Celebrate our monarch's praise,
 And in the sprightly dance our songs triumphant
 raise. 1040

ANTISTROPHE.

What heavenly power gave birth to thee, O king!
 From Pan, the god of mountains, didst thou spring,
 With some fair daughter of Apollo join'd?
 Art thou from him who o'er Cyllene reigns,
 Swift Hermes, sporting in Arcadia's plains? 1045
 Some nymph of Helicon did Bacchus find;—
 Bacchus, who delights to rove
 Through the forest, hill, and grove,
 And art thou, prince, the offspring of their love?

Enter ŒDIPUS, SHEPHERD from Corinth.

ŒDI. If I may judge of one whom yet I ne'er
 Had converse with, yon old man whom I see 1051

This way advancing, must be that same shepherd
 We lately sent for, by his age and mien,
 Ev'n as this stranger did describe him to us.
 My servants too are with him; but you best 1055
 Can say, for you must know him well.

CHO. 'Tis he,
 My lord! the faithful shepherd of King Laius.

ÆDI. [*to the Shepherd from Corinth.*] What say'st
 thou, stranger! is it he?

SHEP. It is.

Enter OLD SHEPHERD.

ÆDI. Now answer me, old man! look this way;
 speak;
 Didst thou belong to Laius?

O. SHEP. Sir, I did: 1060
 No hireling slave, but in his palace bred,
 I serv'd him long.

ÆDI. What was thy business there?

O. SHEP. For my life's better part I tended sheep.

ÆDI. And whither didst thou lead them?

O. SHEP. To Cithæron,
 And to the neighbouring plains.

ÆDI. Behold this man; 1065
 [*pointing to the Shepherd of Corinth.*]

Dost thou remember to have seen him?

O. SHEP. Whom?
 What hath he done?

ÆDI. Him who now stands before thee;
 Call'st thou to mind or converse or connexion
 Between you in times past?

O. SHEP. I cannot say
 I recollect it now.

SHEP. I do not wonder 1070
 He should forget me; but I will recall
 Some facts of ancient date: he must remember,
 When on Cithæron we together fed
 Our several flocks, in daily converse join'd,
 From spring to autumn, and when winter bleak 1075

Approach'd, retired : I to my little cot
Convey'd my sheep, he to the palace led
His fleecy care. Canst thou remember this ?

O. SHEP. I do, but that is long since.

SHEP. It is so ;
But say, good shepherd, canst thou call to mind 1080
An infant, whom thou didst deliver to me,
Requesting me to breed him as my own ?

O. SHEP. Ha ! wherefore ask'st thou this ?

SHEP. [*pointing to ŒDIPUS.*] Behold him here,
That very child.

O. SHEP. O ! say it not ; away !
Perdition on thee !

ŒDI. Why reprove him thus ? 1085
Thou art thyself to blame, old man !

O. SHEP. In what
Am I to blame, my lord ?

ŒDI. Thou wilt not speak
Touching this boy.

O. SHEP. Alas, poor man ! he knows not
What he hath said.

ŒDI. If not by softer means
To be persuaded, force shall wring it from thee. 1090

O. SHEP. Treat not an old man harshly.

ŒDI. [*to the Attendants.*] Bind his hands.

O. SHEP. Wherefore, my lord ? What wouldst thou
have me do ?

ŒDI. That child he talks of, didst thou give it to
him ?

O. SHEP. I did, and would to Heaven I then had
died ! 1094

ŒDI. Die soon thou shalt, unless thou tell'st it all.

O. SHEP. Say, rather, if I do.

ŒDI. This fellow means
To trifle with us, by his dull delay.

O. SHEP. I do not ; said I not, I gave the child ?

ŒDI. Whence came the boy ? Was he thy own,
or who

Did give him to thee ?

SOPH.—A a

O. SHEP. From another hand
I had received him.

ÆDI. Say, what hand ? from who
Whence came he ?

O. SHEP. Do not, by the gods ! I beg t
Do not inquire.

ÆDI. Force me to ask again,
And thou shalt die.

O. SHEP. In Laius' palace born.

ÆDI. Son of a slave, or of the king ?

O. SHEP. Alas !
'Tis death for me to speak.

ÆDI. And me to hear ;
Yet say it.

O. SHEP. He was call'd the son of Laius ;
But ask the queen, for she can best inform thee

ÆDI. Did she then give the child to thee ?

O. SHEP. She

ÆDI. For what ?

O. SHEP. To kill him.

ÆDI. Kill her child ! Inhuman :
And barbarous mother !

O. SHEP. A dire oracle
Affrighted and constrained her to it.

ÆDI. Ha !
What oracle ?

O. SHEP. Which said, her son should slay
His parents.

ÆDI. Wherefore gavest thou then the inf
To this old shepherd ?

O. SHEP. Pity moved me to it : 1
I hoped he would have soon convey'd his charg
To some far distant country : he, alas !
Preserved him but for misery and wo ;
For, O my lord ! if thou indeed art he,
Thou art of all mankind the most unhappy. 1

ÆDI. O me ! at length the mystery's unravell'
'Tis plain ; 'tis clear ; my fate is all determined.
Those are my parents who should not have been

Allied to me: she is my wife, ev'n she,
Whom nature had forbidden me to wed; 1125
I have slain him who gave me life, and now
Of thee, O light! I take my last farewell,
For Œdipus shall ne'er behold thee more. [*Exeunt.*]

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

O, hapless state of human race!
How quick the fleeting shadows pass 1130
Of transitory bliss below,
Where all is vanity and wo!
By thy example taught, O prince! we see
Man was not made for true felicity.

ANTISTROPHE I.

Thou, Œdipus! beyond the rest 1135
Of mortals wert supremely bless'd;
Whom every hand conspired to raise,
Whom every hand rejoiced to praise;
When from the sphinx thy all-preserving hand
Stretch'd forth its aid to save a sinking land. 1140

STROPHE II.

Thy virtues raised thee to a throne,
And grateful Thebes was all thy own:
Alas! how changed that glorious name!
Lost are thy virtues and thy fame.
How couldst thou thus pollute thy father's bed? 1145
How couldst thou thus thy hapless mother wed?

ANTISTROPHE II.

How could that bed unconscious bear
So long the vile, incestuous pair?
But Time, of quick and piercing sight,
Hath brought the horrid deed to light: 1150
At length Jocasta owns her guilty flame,
And finds a husband and a child the same.

EPODE.

Wretched son of Laius! thee
Henceforth may I never see;

But absent shed the pious tear, 1155
 And weep thy fate with grief sincere!
 For thou didst raise our eyes to life and light,
 To close them now in everlasting night. [*Exeunt.*]

ACT V.

MESSENGER, CHORUS.

MES. Sages of Thebes, most honour'd and revered!
 If e'er the house of Labdacus was dear 1160
 And precious to you, what will be your grief,
 When I shall tell the most disastrous tale
 You ever heard, and to your eyes present
 A spectacle more dreadful than they yet
 Did e'er behold? Not the wide Danube's waves,
 Nor Phasis' stream, can wash away the stains 1166
 Of this polluted palace. The dire crimes,
 Long time conceal'd, at length are brought to light;
 But those which spring from voluntary guilt
 Are still more dreadful.

CHO. Nothing can be worse 1170
 Than what we know already; bring'st thou more
 Misfortunes to us?

MES. To be brief, the queen,
 Jocasta, 's dead.

CHO. Say, by what hand?

MES. Her own;
 And, what 's more dreadful, no one saw the deed:
 What I myself beheld, you all shall hear. 1175
 Inflamed with rage, soon as she reach'd the palace,
 Instant retiring to the nuptial bed,
 She shut the door, then raved and tore her hair,
 Called out on Laius dead, and bade him think
 On that unhappy son who murder'd him, 1180
 And stain'd his bed: then, turning her sad eyes

1165 The Ister or Danube is one of the most considerable rivers in Europe; which, passing by Illyricum, runs into the Euxine Sea. Phasis was a famous river in Colchis.

Upon the guilty couch, she cursed the place
 Where she had borne a husband from her husband,
 And children from her child : what follow'd then
 I know not, by the cries of Œdipus 1185
 Prevented, for on him our eyes were fix'd
 Attentive : forth he came, beseeching us
 To lend him some sharp weapon, and inform him
 Where he might find his mother and his wife ;
 His children's wretched mother and his own. 1190
 Some ill-designing power did then direct him
 (For we were silent) to the queen's apartment :
 Forcing the bolt, he rush'd unto the bed,
 And found Jocasta, where we all beheld her,
 Entangled in the fatal noose ; which, soon 1195
 As he perceived, loosing the pendent rope,
 Deeply he groan'd ; and, casting on the ground
 His wretched body, show'd a piteous sight
 To the beholders. On a sudden thence
 Starting, he pluck'd from off the robe she wore
 A golden buckle, that adorn'd her side, 1201
 And buried in his eyes the sharpen'd point,
 Crying, he ne'er again would look on her,
 Never would see his crimes or miseries more,
 Or those whom, guiltless, he could ne'er behold,
 Or those to whom he now must sue for aid. 1206
 His lifted eyelids then, repeating still
 These dreadful plaints, he tore ; while down his
 cheeks

Fell showers of blood : such fate the wretched pair
 Sustain'd, partakers in calamity ; 1210
 Fall'n from a state of happiness (for none
 Were happier once than they) to groans and death,
 Reproach, and shame, and every human wo.

CHO. And where is now the poor unhappy man ?

Mrs. "Open the doors," he cries, "and let all
 Thebes 1215

Behold his parents' murderer !" adding words
 Not to be uttered : banish'd now he says
 He must be, nor, devoted as he is

By his own curse, remain in this sad place.
 He wants a kind conductor, and a friend 1220
 To help him now, for 'tis too much to bear.
 But you will see him soon; for lo! the doors
 Are open'd, and you will behold a sight
 That would to pity move his deadliest foe.

Enter ŒDIPUS.

CHO. O horrid sight! more dreadful spectacle
 Than e'er these eyes beheld! What madness urged
 thee 1226
 To this sad deed? What power malignant heap'd
 On thy poor head such complicated wo!
 Unhappy man! Alas! I would have held
 Some converse with thee, but thy looks affright me:
 I cannot bear to speak to thee.

ŒDI. O me! 1231
 Where am I, and whence comes the voice I hear?
 Where art thou, fortune?

CHO. Changed to misery,
 Dreadful to hear, and dreadful to behold.

ŒDI. O cruel darkness! endless, hopeless night!
 Shame, terrors, and unutterable wo! 1236
 More painful is the memory of my crimes
 Than all the wounds my wild distraction made.

CHO. Thus doubly cursed, O prince! I wonder
 not
 At thy affliction.

ŒDI. Art thou here, my friend? 1240
 I know thy voice: thou wouldst not leave the
 wretched;
 Thou art my faithful, kind assistant still.

CHO. How couldst thou thus deprive thyself of
 sight?
 What madness drove thee to the desperate deed?
 What god inspired?

ŒDI. Apollo was the cause; 1245

1245 By delivering the oracle which foretold that Œdipus
 should kill his father, and afterward pronouncing the dreadful
 sentence against the murderer.

He was, my friends, the cause of all my woes ;
But for these eyes, myself did quench their light ;
I want not them. What use were they to me,
But to discover scenes of endless wo ?

CHO. 'Tis but too true.

ŒDI. What pleasure now remains 1250
For Œdipus ? He cannot joy in aught
To sight or ear delightful. Curse on him,
Whoe'er he was, that loosen'd my bound feet,
And saved me, in Cithæron's vale, from death !
I owe him nothing ; had I perish'd then, 1255
Much happier had it been for you, my friends,
And for myself.

CHO. I too could wish thou hadst.

ŒDI. I should not then have murdered Laius ;
then
I had not ta'en Jocasta to my bed :
But now I am a guilty wretch, the son 1260
Of a polluted mother, father now
To my own brother : all that's horrible
To nature is the lot of Œdipus.

CHO. Yet must I blame this cruel act ; for, sure,
The loss of sight is worse than death itself. 1265

ŒDI. I care not for thy counsel or thy praise ;
For with what eyes could I have e'er beheld
My honour'd father in the shades below,
Or my unhappy mother, both destroy'd 1269
By me ? This punishment is worse than death ;
And so it should be. Sweet had been the sight
Of my dear children ; them I could have wish'd
To gaze on ; but I must never see
Or them, or this fair city, or the palace
Where I was born : deprived of every bliss 1275
By my own lips, which doom'd to banishment
The murderer of Laius, and expelled
The impious wretch, by gods and men accursed ;—
Could I behold them after this ? O, no !
Would I could now with equal ease remove 1280
My hearing too, be deaf as well as blind,

And from another entrance shut out wo !
 To want our senses, in the hour of ill,
 Is comfort to the wretched. O Cithæron !
 Why didst thou e'er receive me, or, received, 1285
 Why not destroy, that men might never know
 Who gave me birth ? O Polybus ! O Corinth !
 And thou, long time believed my father's palace !
 O, what a foul disgrace to human nature
 Didst thou receive beneath a prince's form ! 1290
 Impious myself, and from an impious race.
 Where is my splendour now ? O Daulian path !
 The shady forest, and the narrow pass
 Where three ways meet, who drank a father's blood,
 Shed by these hands ; do you not still remember
 The horrid deed, and what, when here I came, 1296
 Follow'd more dreadful ? Fatal nuptials ! you
 Produced me, you returned me to the womb
 That bare me : thence relations horrible
 Of fathers, sons, and brothers came : of wives,
 Sisters, and mothers, sad alliance ! all 1301
 That man holds impious and detestable.
 But what in act is vile, the modest tongue
 Should never name. Bury me, hide me, friends,
 From every eye ! destroy me, cast me forth 1305
 To the wide ocean ! let me perish there ;
 Do any thing to shake off hated life.
 Seize me ! approach, my friends ! you need not fear,
 Polluted though I am, to touch me. None
 Shall suffer for my crimes but I alone. 1310
 CHO. In most fit time, my lord, the noble Creon
 This way advances : he can best determine,
 And best advise ; sole guardian now of Thebes,
 To him thy power devolves.

1288 That is, the palace of Polybus King of Corinth, the supposed father of Œdipus, who brought him up as his own, and educated him accordingly.

1308 Alluding to a superstitious notion among the ancients, that it was dangerous even to touch an accursed person, or one seemingly visited with misfortunes by the gods.

[Exit Messenger.]

Enter CREON.

1320

1330

9

1336

gods

1340

en?

CRE. Thy hapless fate should teach us to believe
And reverence the gods.

ÆDI. Now, Creon, list : 1345
I beg thee, I conjure thee, let a tomb
Be raised, and all due honours paid to her
Who lies within. She was thy sister, Creon.
It is a duty which thou owest : for me,
I cannot hope this city now will deign 1350
To keep me here. O Creon ! let me go,
And seek the solitary mountain's top,
My own Cithæron, by my parents doom'd
Long since to be the grave of Œdipus :
There would I die, as they decreed I should. 1355
Alas ! I cannot, must not perish yet,
Till I have suffer'd evils worse than death,
For I was only saved to be unhappy ;
But I must meet my fate, whate'er it be.
My sons are men, and wheresoever fortune 1360
May place them, cannot want the means of life.
They shall not burden thee ; but O, my friend !
What will become of my unhappy daughters,
With tenderest love, beneath a father's hand 1364
Cherish'd so long ? O ! take them to thy care,
Thou best of men ! O ! might I but embrace them,
But shed a tear o'er their disastrous fate ;
Might I be suffer'd but to touch them here ;
I should rejoice, and think I saw them still.
But hark ! methinks e'en now I hear the voice 1370
Of my dear daughters. Hath the gracious Creon,
In pity to my woes, already brought
My children to me ? Is it so ?

CRE. It is :
Thy wishes are prevented ; they are here.

Enter DAUGHTERS OF ŒDIPUS.

ÆDI. May Heaven reward thee for this goodness
to me, 1375
And give thee much more bliss than I have known !
Now, my dear children ! come towards me, come

Towards your father and your—brother : see
These sightless eyes, pierced by my own mad hands ;
Behold that wretched father who begat you 1380
Unknowingly on her who gave me birth.

I cannot see you now ; I can but weep
Your fate, to think what hours of wretchedness
You have to know hereafter. Whither now
Must my poor children fly ? From every feast, 1385
Joyless, with grief and shame, shall you return ;
And when the time shall come when riper years
Should give you to the nuptial bed, who then,
Careless of fame, will let his child partake
The infamy of my abhorred race, 1390
Sprung from a wretch accursed, who kill'd his fa-
ther,

And from the womb that bare him did beget
You, my unhappy daughters ! Such reproach
Must still be yours, to virgin solitude
Devoted ever and a barren bed. 1395

Son of Menœceus ! thou alone art left
Their father now ; for O ! Jocasta's dead,
And I am—nothing : do not then forsake
Thy kindred ; nor, deserted and forlorn,
Suffer them still, in penury and wo, 1400
To wander helpless, in their tender age.

Remember, they have no support but thee.
O generous prince ! have pity on them ; give me
Thy friendly hand in promise of thy aid.
To you, my daughters ! had your early years 1405
Permitted, I had given my last advice :

Too young for counsel, all I ask of you
Is but to pray the gods that my sad life
May not be long ; but yours, my children ! crown'd
With many days, and happier far than mine. 1410

CRÆ. It is enough : go in ; thy grief transports
thee
Beyond all bounds.

ŒDI. 'Tis hard, but I submit.

CRÆ. The time demands it ; therefore go.

- ŒDI. O Creon!
 Know'st thou what now I wish ?
 CRE. What is it? Speak.
 ŒDI. That I may quit this fatal place.
 CRE. Thou ask'st
 What Heaven alone can grant.
 ŒDI. Alas! to Heaven 1416
 I am most hateful.
 CRE. Yet shalt thou obtain
 What thou desirest.
 ŒDI. Shall I indeed ?
 CRE. Thou shalt;
 I never say aught that I do not mean. 1419
 ŒDI. Then let me go: may I depart ?
 CRE. Thou mayst;
 But leave thy children.
 ŒDI. Do not take them from me.
 CRE. Thou must not always have thy will; already
 Thou hast suffer'd for it.
 CHO. Thebans! now behold
 The great, the mighty Œdipus, who once
 The sphinx's dark enigma could unfold; 1425
 Who less to fortune than to wisdom owed;
 In virtue, as in rank, to all superior;
 Yet fallen at last to deepest misery.
 Let mortals hence be taught to look beyond
 The present time, nor dare to say a man 1430
 Is happy, till the last decisive hour
 Shall close his life without the taste of wo.

ŒDIPUS COLONEUS.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

ŒDIPUS.

CREON.

ANTIGONE, } daughters of Œdipus.

ISMENE,

POLYNICES, son of Œdipus.

THESEUS, king of Athens.

AN ATHENIAN.

MESSENGER.

ATTENDANTS on Creon, Theseus, and Ismene.

CHORUS, composed of ancient men of Athens.

ŒDIPUS COLONEUS.

ARGUMENT.

THIS tragedy is a continuation of the history of Œdipus ; who, condemned to perpetual banishment from Thebes, arrived at last with his daughter Antigone, at Coloneus, a little hill in the neighbourhood of Athens sacred to the Furies, where he solicited and obtained the protection of King Theseus. In this retreat he was overtaken by his daughter Ismene. In the mean time, Creon, having learned from the oracle that prosperity awaited the country which should possess the bones of Œdipus, endeavoured to remove him by entreaty or force ; but the power of Theseus soon compelled him to relinquish the attempt. At this juncture Polynices arrived, with the design of reconciling his father to his intended invasion of Thebes ; but the exiled monarch uttered the bitterest imprecations on his impious purpose, and prophesied the horrible fate which awaited him. Finding his end fast approaching, he sent for Theseus, and informed him that an uninterrupted course of prosperity would befall Athens so long as his burial-place was revealed to no one but the reigning monarch of the country. Having then dismissed his daughters, and being left alone with Theseus, he resigned himself to his fate ; while the king faithfully complied with his injunctions of concealing the circumstances of his death and interment.

ACT I.

Scene, a grove, at the entrance to the temple of the Furies.

ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE.

ŒDI. Where are we now, my dear Antigone ?
Know'st thou the palace ? Will any here afford
Their scanty alms to a poor wanderer,
The banish'd Œdipus ? I ask not much,

Yet less receive ; but I am satisfied : 5
 Long time hath made my woes familiar to me,
 And I have learn'd to bear calamity.
 But tell me, daughter ! if thou seest a place
 Or sacred, or profane, where I may rest :
 There set me down ; from some inhabitant 10
 A chance but we may learn where now we are,
 And act (so strangers ought) as he directs us.

ANT. O, Œdipus ! my poor, unhappy father !
 Far as my eyes can reach, I see a city,
 With lofty turrets crown'd ; and, if I err not, 15
 This place is sacred, by the laurel shade,
 Olive and vine thick planted, and the songs
 Of nightingale sweet warbling through the grove.
 Here sit thee down, and rest thy wearied limbs
 On this rude stone ; 'tis a long way for age 20
 Like thine to travel.

ŒDI. Place me here, and guard
 A sightless wretch.

ANT. Alas ! at such a time
 Thou need'st not tell Antigone her duty.

ŒDI. Know'st thou not where we are ?

ANT. As I have learn'd
 From passing travellers, not far from Athens ; 25
 The place I know not. Would you that I go,
 And straight inquire ? But now I need not leave
 thee,

For, lo ! a stranger comes this way ; ev'n now
 He stands before you : he will soon inform us.

Enter an ATHENIAN.

ŒDI. Stranger ! thou com'st in happy hour to
 tell us 30
 What much we wish to know ; let me then ask thee—

ATH. Ask nothing : speak not till thou art removed
 From off that hallow'd spot where now thou stand'st,
 By human footsteps not to be profaned.

ŒDI. To whom then is it sacred ?

ATH. 'Tis a place, 35
Where but to tread is impious, and to dwell
Forbidden: where the dreadful goddesses,
Daughters of Earth and Night, alone inhabit.

ŒDI. Ha! let me hear their venerable names.

ATH. By other names in other climes adored, 40
The natives here call them Eumenides,
The all-seeing Powers.

ŒDI. O! that they would but smile
Propitious, and receive a suppliant's prayer,
That I might never leave this blest abode!

ATH. What dost thou mean?

ŒDI. It suits my sorrows well. 45

ATH. I must inform the citizens; till then
Remain.

ŒDI. O! do not scorn a wretched exile,
But tell me, stranger!—

ATH. Speak; I scorn thee not.

ŒDI. What place is this?

ATH. I'll tell you what I know.
This place is sacred all: great Neptune here 50
Presides, and he who bears the living fire,
Titan Prometheus; where thou tread'st, is called
The brazen way, the bulwark of our state:
From this equestrian hill, their safest guard,
The neighbouring villagers their general name 55
Derive, thence called Colonians all.

ŒDI. But say,
Are there who dwell here then?

37 These dreadful goddesses were the three Furies, Alecto, Megæra, and Tisiphone.

52 Prometheus, according to the tales of the heathens concerning him, was supposed to have stolen fire from heaven, and with it to have made men; for which impiety he was punished by the gods in the same manner as the rebellious Titans; he is therefore called, in this place, Titan Prometheus.

53 Near this brazen way was supposed to be the passage to Hades, or the shades, by which Pluto conveyed the ravished Proserpine to his dominions.

ATH. There are, and called
From him they worship.

ŒDI. Is the power supreme
Lodged in the people's voice, or in the king ?

ATH. 'Tis in the king.

ŒDI. Who is he ?

ATH. Theseus, son 60
Of Ægeus, their last sovereign.

ŒDI. Who will go
And tell him—

ATH. What, to come and meet thee here ?

ŒDI. To tell him that a little help bestow'd
Would amply be repaid.

ATH. Why, what couldst thou do,
Dark as thou art ?

ŒDI. My words will not be so. 65

ATH. Then mark me, that thou err not ; for to me
Thy fortune seems ill suited to thy nature,
Which is most noble ; therefore stay thou here
Till I return ; I will not go to Athens,
But ask these villagers, who sojourn here, 70
If thou mayst stay. [*Exit Athenian.*]

ŒDI. My daughter, is he gone ?

ANT. He is, and thou mayst safely speak, for I
Alone am with thee.

ŒDI. Goddesses revered :
Since in your seats my wearied steps have found
Their first repose, not inauspicious smile 75
On Phœbus and on me ! For, know, the god,
Who 'gainst unhappy Œdipus denounced
Unnumber'd woes, foretold that here at last
I should have rest, within this hallow'd grove,
These hospitable shades, and finish here 80
A life of misery. "Happy those," he said,
"Who should receive me, glorious their reward ;
And wo to them who strove to drive me hence
Inhuman : " this he promised to confirm
By signs undoubted ; thunder, or the sound 85
Of dreadful earthquake, or the lightning's blast

Launch'd from the arm of Jove : I doubt it not,
 From you some happy omen hither led
 My prosperous steps. That first to you he came
 Pure to the pure, and here on this rude seat 90
 Reposed me, could not be the work of chance.
 Wherefore, ye' Powers ! as Phœbus hath decreed,
 Here let me find a period of my woes,
 Here end my wretched life ; unless the man,
 Who long hath groan'd beneath the bitterest ills 95
 That mortals feel, still seem to merit more.
 Daughters of ancient Night ! O, hear me now !
 And thou, from great Minerva call'd the best
 And noblest city, Athens ! pity me ;
 Pity the shadow of poor Œdipus ! 100
 For, O ! I am not what I was.

ANT. No more ;
 Behold, a venerable band approach
 Of ancient natives, come perchance to seek thee.
 ŒDI. I've done ; Antigone ! remove me hence,
 And hide me in the grove, till, by their words, 105
 Listening I learn their purpose ; such foreknowledge
 Will best direct us how to act hereafter. [*Exeunt.*]

Enter CHORUS.

CHO. Where is he ? Look, examine, search around
 For this abandon'd exile, of mankind
 The most profane, doubtless some wretched stranger :
 Who else had dared on this forbidden soil 111
 To tread, where dwell the dreadful deities
 We tremble ev'n to name ; and as we pass,
 Dare not behold, but silently revere,
 Or soft with words of fairest omen greet ? 115
 Of these regardless, here we come to find
 An impious wretch. I look around the grove,
 But still he lurks unseen.

Enter ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE.

ŒDI. Behold me here ;
 For by your words I find you look for me.

CHO. [*looking steadfastly at him.*] Dreadful his voice,
and terrible his aspect! 120

ÆDI. I am no outlaw; do not look thus on me.

CHO. Jove the defender! Who is this old man?

ÆDI. One on whom Fortune little hath bestow'd
To call for reverence from you; that, alas!
Is but too plain; thus by another's eyes 125
Conducted here, and on her aid depending,
Old as I am.

CHO. Alas! and wert thou born
Thus sightless? Full of sorrow and of years
Indeed thou seem'st; but do not let on us
Thy cursedevolve: thou hast transgress'd the bounds
Prescribed to mortals: shun the hallow'd grove, 131
Where, on the grassy surface, to the powers
A welcome offering flows, with honey mix'd,
The limpid stream; unhappy stranger! hence,
Away, begone: thou seest 'tis a long space 135
Divides us. Dost thou hear me, wretched exile?
This instant, if thou dost, depart; then speak,
But not before.

ÆDI. Antigone, my daughter!
What's to be done?

ANT. Obey the citizens;
Give me thy hand.

ÆDI. I will; and now, my friends! 140
Confiding thus in you, and thus removing,
As you directed, let me not be injured.

CHO. Thou shalt not: be assured, that thou art
safe;
None shall offend or drive thee hence.

ÆDI. Yet more
Must I approach?

CHO. A little farther still. 145

ÆDI. Will this suffice?

CHO. Remove him this way, virgin!
Thou hear'st us.

ANT. Thou must follow me, my father!
Weak as thou art: we are unhappy strangers,

And must submit: whate'er the city hates
Content to hate, and what she loves to love. 150

ŒDI. Lead me, my daughter! to some hallow'd
spot

For mutual converse fit, nor let us strive
With dire necessity.

CHO. Stop there, nor move

Beyond that stone.

ŒDI. Thus then?

CHO. It is enough.

ŒDI. Where shall I sit.

CHO. A little forward lean 155

And rest thee there. [*taking hold of him.*]

ANT. Alas! 'tis my sad office

(Let me perform it) to direct thy steps;

To this loved hand commit thy aged limbs:

I will be careful. [*she seats him on the stone.*]

ŒDI. O unhappy state!

CHO. Now, wretched stranger! tell us who thou
art, 160

Thy country and thy name.

ŒDI. Alas, my lords!

A poor abandon'd exile; but, O! do not—

CHO. What say'st thou?

ŒDI. Do not ask me who I am;

Inquire no farther.

CHO. Wherefore?

ŒDI. My sad race—

CHO. Speak on.

ŒDI. [*turning to Antigone.*] My daughter! how
shall I proceed? 165

CHO. Thy race, thy father—

ŒDI. O Antigone!

What do I suffer?

ANT. Speak, thou canst not be

More wretched than thou art.

ŒDI. I will, for, O!

It cannot be conceal'd.

CHO. You do delay;

Inform us straight.

ŒDI. Know you the son of Laius ? 170

CHO. Alas !

ŒDI. The race of Labdacus ?

CHO. O Jove !

ŒDI. The unhappy Œdipus.

CHO. And art thou he ?

ŒDI. Be not affrighted at my words.

CHO. O heaven !

ŒDI. Wretch that I am ! What will become of me ?

CHO. Away ! begone ! fly from this place !

ŒDI. Then where 175

Are all your promises ? are they forgotten ?

CHO. Justice divine will never punish those

Who but repay the injury they receive :

And fraud doth merit fraud for its reward.

Wherefore begone, and leave us, lest once more 180

Our city be compell'd to force thee hence.

ANT. O my kind friends ! as you revere the name
Of virtue, though you will not hear the prayers

Of my unhappy father, worn with age,

And laden with involuntary crimes ; 185

Yet hear the daughter pleading for her sire,

And pity her, who with no evil eye

Beholds you, but, as one of the same race,

Born of one common father, here entreats

Your mercy to the unhappy ; for on you, 190

As on some god alone, we must rely.

Then grant this wish'd-for boon ; O ! grant it now ;

By all that's dear to thee, thy sacred word,

Thy interest, thy children, and thy god :

'Tis not in mortal to avoid the crime 195

Which Heaven hath pre-ordain'd.

CHO. We pity thee,

Daughter of Œdipus ! we pity him,

And his misfortunes ; but, of wrath divine

Still fearful, dare not alter our decree.

ŒDI. Now who shall trust to glory and fair fame !

What shall it profit, that your pious city 201
 Was once for hospitable rites renown'd,
 That she alone would pity and relieve
 The afflicted stranger? Is she so to me,
 Who drives me hence, and trembles at a name? 205
 Me you can never fear; and for my crimes,
 I am the sufferer, not the offender. What
 Touching my father I have spoke (alas!
 If 'tis for that you do abhor me thus),
 Was I to blame? The injury received 210
 I but repaid, and therefore had I known
 The crime I acted, I were guiltless still.
 Whither I came, I came unknowingly;
 Not so they acted who have banish'd me.
 By your commands already here removed, 215
 O! by the gods, preserve, assist me now:
 If you revere them, do not thus despise
 What they decree; their eyes behold the good,
 And view the evil man, nor shall the wicked
 Escape their wrath: use not their sacred names 220
 To cover crimes, and stain the fame of Athens.
 As you receive the suppliant, O! remember
 Your plighted faith, preserve me, save me now;
 Look not contemptuous on this wretched form,
 Or cast reproach unmerited: I come 225
 Nor impious nor profane; and with me bring
 To Athens much of profit and renown,
 As, when your king arrives, you all shall know:
 Meantime despise me not.

CHO. Old man! thy words
 Are full of weight, and merit our observance. 230
 If those who here preside but know thy purpose,
 It doth suffice.

ŒDI. But say, where is the king?

CHO. Within his palace; but a messenger
 Is gone to fetch him hither.

ŒDI. O my friends!
 Think you a sightless wretch like me will move 235
 His pity or his care, that he will come?

CHO. Most readily, when he shall hear the name
Of Œdipus.

ŒDI. And who shall tell it him ?

CHO. The journey's long; but passing travellers
Will watch the tale, and he must hear it soon. 240
Fear not; thy story is already known
On every side; 'twill quicken his slow steps,
And bring him instant hither.

ŒDI. May he come
In happy hour to Athens and to me! 244
He will; what good man doth not love his country ?

ANT. O Jove! what shall I say or think? My
father!

ŒDI. What says my daughter?

ANT. This way bent, behold,
On a Sicilian steed, a woman comes,
Her face conceal'd by a Thessalian vail,
To shield her from the sun. Am I deceived, 250
Or is it she? I know not what to think.
It is my sister; now she smiles upon me:
It must, it can be none but my Ismene.

ŒDI. Who? my Antigone?

ANT. It is thy daughter,
My sister; but her voice will soon convince thee. 255

Enter ISMENE and ATTENDANT.

ISM. O the sweet sounds! a father and a sister!
What pains have I not suffer'd in the search,
And now for grief can scarce behold you!

ŒDI.

My daughter! art thou here?

ISM.

How terribly thou look'st!

Alas, my father!

ŒDI.

The father and the daughter.

From the same blood 260

ISM.

Wretched race!

ŒDI. And art thou come, my daughter?

ISM.

With toil and labour.

I have reach'd thee

ŒDI. Touch me, O my child !

ISM. Let me embrace you both.

ŒDI. Both miserable !

ISM. [*they all embrace.*] Join then a third as wretched
as yourselves. 265

ŒDI. Ismene ! wherefore art thou come ?

ISM. My care

For thee, my father ! brought me here.

ŒDI. For me !

ISM. That I might speak to thee : this faithful slave
Alone conducted me. [*pointing to her Attendant.*]

ŒDI. Thy brother, say,

What are they doing ?

ISM. They are—what they are : 270

For, O ! between them deadliest discord reigns.

ŒDI. How like the unmanly sons of Egypt's clime,
Where the men sit inglorious at the loom,
And to their wives leave each domestic care !

Ev'n thus, my sons ! who should have labour'd for
me, 275

Like women idly sit at home, while you
Perform their office, and with filial care
Attend a wretched father : this kind maid,

[*pointing to Antigone.*]

Ev'n from her infant days, hath wander'd long
An exile with me, and supported still 280

My feeble age ; oft through the savage woods,

Naked and hungry, by the wintry storms,

Or scorching heats afflicted, led me on,

And gave me food unmindful of her own.

Thou too, Ismene ! wert my faithful guard, 285

When I was driven forth : and now art come

To tell thy father what the gods declare.

A stranger now to Thebes, I know not what
Hath pass'd between them : thou hast some sad news,
I know thou hast, to tell thy wretched father. 290

ISM. What I have suffer'd in the search of thee,
I pass in silence o'er, since to repeat

Were but, alas ! to double my misfortunes.

SOPH.—C c

I only came to tell thee the sad fate
 Of thy unhappy sons ; awhile they seem'd 295
 As if they meant to yield the throne to Creon,
 Nor stain their guilty hands with Theban blood,
 Mindful of that pollution which remained
 On thy devoted race ; but now some god, 299
 Or their own wicked minds, have raised a flame
 Of dire contention, which shall gain the power
 Supreme, and reign in Thebes : Eteocles
 Hath drove his elder Polynices forth,
 Who, now an exile, seeks (as Fame reports)
 The Argians, and, in solemn contract join'd 305
 With these his new allies, would raise their fame
 Above the stars, and sink our Thebes in ruin.
 These are not words alone, 'tis now in act.
 Alas ! ev'n now I fear ; nor know I when
 The gods will take compassion on thy woes. 310

ŒDI. Hast thou no hope they'll pity me ?

ISM.

I have ;

Their oracles have said it.

ŒDI.

Ha ! said what,

My daughter ? Tell me, what have they declared ?

ISM. The time would come, they said, when Thebes
 once more

Must seek thee, dead or living, for her safety. 315

ŒDI. Why, what could such a wretch as I do for
 them ?

ISM. Their only hope, they say, is placed in thee.

ŒDI. I, that am nothing, grown so powerful !

Whence

Can it proceed ?

ISM.

The gods, who once depress'd thee,
 Now raise thee up again.

ŒDI.

It cannot be ;

320

Who falls in youth will never rise in age.

ISM. Know, for this very purpose Creon comes ;
 Ere long thou mayst expect him.

ŒDI.

What to do,

My daughter ?

ISM. To remove thee hence, and place thee
Nearer to Thebes, but not within her borders. 325

ŒDI. If not within her walls, what can it be
To them?

ISM. Thy tomb, raised in a foreign land,
They fear would prove most fatal.

ŒDI. But how know they
It must be so, unless some god declared it?

ISM. For this alone they wish to have thee near
The borders, in their power, and not thy own. 331

ŒDI. To bury me at Thebes?

ISM. That cannot be;
Thy crime forbids it.

ŒDI. Then I'll never go.

ISM. A time will come when they shall feel thy
vengeance.

ŒDI. What strange vicissitude can e'er produce
This wish'd event?

ISM. Thy wrath, when at thy tomb 336
They shall be forced to meet.

ŒDI. Who told thee this?
Ismene, say.

ISM. The sacred ministers
Of Delphi.

ŒDI. Came it from Apollo's shrine?

ISM. On their return to Thebes they did report it.

ŒDI. My sons, did they hear aught of this? 341

ISM. Both heard,
And know it well.

ŒDI. Yet, impious as they are,
Preferr'd a kingdom to their father's love.

ISM. With grief I tell thee what with grief I heard.

ŒDI. O! may the gods doom them to endless
strife! 345

Ne'er may the battle cease, till Œdipus
Himself shall end it! Then, nor he who bears
The sceptre now should long maintain the throne,
Nor Polynices e'er to Thebes return:
They should not live, who drove a parent forth 350

To misery and exile ; left by those
 Who should have loved, supported, and revered him.
 I know they say, the city but complied
 With my request ; I ask'd for banishment,
 Nor then I ask'd it : in my desperate mind, 355
 When first I raged, I wish'd indeed for death ;
 It had been grateful then : but no kind friend
 Would minister the boon : at length, my grief
 Gave way ; and when they saw my troubled soul
 Had taken ample vengeance on itself, 360
 After long stay, the city drove me forth ;
 And those who could have saved me, my base sons,
 Deaf to a father's prayers, permit me still
 To roam abroad, in poverty and exile :
 From these alone, far as their tender sex 365
 Can help me, I receive the means of life,
 All the sweet comfort, food, or needful rest
 Earth can afford me now ; while to my sons
 A throne was dearer than a father's love.
 But they shall never gain me for their friend, 370
 Ne'er reign in Thebes ; these oracles declare
 They never shall. I do remember too
 Another prophecy, which Phœbus erst
 Deliver'd to me : let 'em send their Creon,
 Or any other powerful citizen, 375
 To drag me hence : my hospitable friends,
 If to these all-protecting deities
 Who here preside, you too will lend your aid,
 Athens shall find in me its best defence,
 And vengeance strike the foes of Œdipus. 380

CHO. Thou and thy daughters well deserve our
 pity ;

And, for thy words are full of promised good
 To our loved city, I will tell thee all
 'Tis meet thou shouldst perform.

ŒDI. My best of friends !
 Instruct me ; I am ready to obey. 385

CHO. An expiation instant must thou make
 To the offended powers, whose sacred seat
 Thou hast profaned.

ŒDI. But how must it be done ?

CHO. First, with pure hands from the ever-flowing
spring,

Thy due libations pour.

ŒDI. What follows then ? 390

CHO. Take thou a cup wrought by some skilful
hand ;

Bind it with wreaths around.

ŒDI. Of leaves or threads

Composed ?

CHO. Of wool, fresh from the new-shorn lamb.

ŒDI. Is there aught else ?

CHO. Then, turning to the sun,

Make thy libations.

ŒDI. From the cup, thou say'st ? 395

CHO. The water from three fountains drawn ; and
last,

Remember, none be left.

ŒDI. With that alone

Must it be fill'd ?

CHO. Water with honey mix'd,

No wine ; this pour on the earth—

ŒDI. What then remains ?

CHO. Take in thy hand of olive boughs thrice nine ;
And offering these, begin thy humble prayer. 401

ŒDI. But how address them ? That concerns me
near.

CHO. Their name, thou know'st, implies benevo-
lent ;

Entreat them, therefore, kindly now to prove
Benevolent to thee ; this by thyself, 405

Or by another for thee : but, remember,
Low be the voice, and short the supplication.

That done, return ; be careful to perform it.

I may assist thee then with confidence ;

But, if thou dost it not, must tremble for thee. 410

ŒDI. My daughters. heard you this ?

ANT. We did ; command

What's to be done.

ŒDI. What I can never do,
Powerless and blind as I am ; one of you,
My daughters, must perform it.

ANT. One alone
May do the task of many, when the mind 415
Is active in it.

ŒDI. Hence then, quick, away ;
But do not leave me here alone : these limbs,
Without a guide will never find their way.

ISM. Father ! I go : but how to find the place,
I know not.

CHO. Stranger ! t'other side of the grove ; 420
There, some inhabitant will soon inform thee,
If thou shouldst want assistance or instruction.

ISM. Meantime, Antigone ! remain thou here,
And guard our father well : cares are not cares 424
When we endure them for a parent's sake. [*Exit.*

CHO. Stranger ! albeit we know 'tis most ungrate-
ful

To raise the sad remembrance of past woes,
Yet would we gladly hear—

ŒDI. What wouldst thou know !

CHO. The cause of thy unhappy state.

ŒDI. Alas !

By all the sacred hospitable rites, 430
I beg thee do not ask me to reveal it ;
My crimes are horrible.

CHO. Already fame
Hath spread them wide, and still talks loudly of
them :

Tell us the truth.

ŒDI. Alas !

CHO. Let me beseech thee.

ŒDI. O me !

CHO. Comply : ask what thou wilt of me,
And thou shalt have it.

ŒDI. I have suffer'd much : 436
The gods can witness, 'twas against my will :
I knew not of it.

- CHO. Knew not what ?
 ŒDI. The city,
 Unknowing too, bound me in horrid nuptials.
 CHO. And didst thou then pollute, as fame reports,
 Thy mother's bed ?
 ŒDI. O death to hear ! I did : 441
 Here, here they are.
 CHO. Who's there ?
 ŒDI. My crimes ! my daughters !
 CHO. Daughters and sisters of their father ! O !
 'Tis horrible indeed.
 ŒDI. 'Tis wo on wo.
 CHO. Great Jove ! both daughters of one hapless
 mother ! 445
 What hast thou suffer'd !
 ŒDI. Ills not to be borne !
 CHO. Didst thou then perpetrate the horrid deed !
 ŒDI. O no.
 CHO. Not do it !
 ŒDI. I received from Thebes
 A fatal gift ; would I had never taken it ! 449
 CHO. And art thou not a murderer too ?
 ŒDI. What's that
 Thou say'st ?
 CHO. Thy father—
 ŒDI. Thou add'st grief to grief.
 CHO. Didst thou not murder him ?
 ŒDI. I did : but hear—
 CHO. Hear what ?
 ŒDI. The cause.
 CHO. What cause ?
 ŒDI. I'll tell thee : know then,
 I murder'd others too ; yet by the laws
 I stand absolved : 'twas done in ignorance. 455
 CHO. [*Seeing Theseus, who enters.*] But, lo ! the
 king, Ægean Theseus, comes :
 The fame of thee hath brought him here already.

449 Meaning the throne of Thebes, with Jocasta, whom he married.

THE. O son of Laius ! long ere this the tale
 Of thy disastrous fate, by many a tongue
 Related, I had heard ; thy eyes torn forth 460
 By thy own desperate hand, and now I see
 It was too true ; thy garb, and dreadful aspect
 Speak who thou art. Unhappy Œdipus,
 I come to ask in pity to thy woes,
 What's thy request to Athens or to me ; 465
 Thine, or this hapless virgin on thy steps
 Attendant, speak ; for large must be the boon
 I would refuse thee : I have known too well
 (Myself a wretched wanderer) the woes
 Of cruel exile, not to pity thine. 470
 Of toils and dangers, in a foreign land,
 Much have I suffer'd ; therefore not to me
 Shall the poor stranger ever sue in vain
 For aid and safety ; mortals as we are,
 Uncertain ever is to-morrow's fate, 475
 Alike unknown to, Theseus and to thee.

ŒDI. Theseus ! thy words declare thy noble
 nature,
 And leave me little to reply : thou know'st
 My story, whom and whence I am ; no more
 Remains, but that I tell thee my request, 480
 And we have done.

THE. Proceed then, and inform me.

ŒDI. I come to give this wretched body to thee,
 To sight ungracious, but of worth more dear
 To thee than fairest forms could boast.

THE. What worth ?

ŒDI. Hereafter thou shalt know, not now.

THE. But when 485
 Shall we receive it ?

ŒDI. When I am no more ;
 When thou shalt bury me.

THE. Death is, it seems,
 Thy chief concern, and life not worth thy care.

ŒDI. That will procure me all the means of life.

THE. And is this all thou ask'st, this little boon !

ŒDI. Not little is the strife which shall ensue. 491

THE. What strife ? with whom ? thy children or my own ?

ŒDI. Mine, Theseus ! they would have me back to Thebes.

THE. And wouldst thou rather be an exile here ?

ŒDI. Once they refused me.

THE. Anger suits but ill

With low estate and miseries like thine. 496

ŒDI. Hear first, and then condemn me.

THE. Not unheard

All thou canst urge, would I reprove thee : speak.

ŒDI. O Theseus ! I have borne the worst of ills.

THE. The curses on thy race ?

ŒDI. O no ; all Greece

Hath heard of them.

THE. What more than mortal wo 501

Afflicts thee then ?

ŒDI. Ev'n this ; my cruel sons

Have driven me from my country : never more

Must Thebes receive a parricide.

THE. Why then

Recall thee now, if thou must ne'er return ? 505

ŒDI. Commanded by an oracle divine.

THE. Why, what doth it declare ?

ŒDI. That Thebes shall yield

To thee and to thy arms.

THE. But whence shall spring

Such dire contention ?

ŒDI. Dearest son of Ægeus !

From age and death exempt, the gods alone 510

Immortal and unchangeable remain,

While all things else fall by the hand of Time,

The universal conqueror : earth laments

Her fertile powers exhausted ; human strength

Is withered soon ; ev'n faith and truth decay, 515

And from their ashes fraud and falsehood rise :

Nor friendship long from man to man endures,

Or realm to realm : to each successive rise ;
 Bitter and sweet, and happiness and wo.
 Athens and Thebes thou seest united now, 520
 And all is well ; but passing time shall bring
 The fatal day (and slight will be the cause)
 That soon shall change the bonds of amity
 And holy faith, for feuds and deadliest hate.
 Then buried long in earth, shall this cold corse 525
 Drink their warm blood, which from the mutual
 wound

Frequent shall flow : it must be as I tell thee,
 If Jove be Jove, and great Apollo true.
 But why should I reveal the fix'd decree
 Of all-deciding Heaven ? Permit me now 530
 To end where I began : thy plighted faith
 Once more confirm ; and never shalt thou say
 The wretched Œdipus to Theseus came
 A useless and unprofitable guest,
 If the immortal gods have not deceived me. 535

CHO. O king ! already hath this man declared
 The same good will to thee and to our country.

THE. Can I reject benevolence and love
 Like this, my friends ? O no ; the common rites
 Of hospitality, this altar here, 540
 The witness of our mutual vows, forbid it.
 He comes a suppliant to these goddesses,
 And pays no little tribute both to me
 And to my kingdom : he shall find a seat
 Within my realms, for I revere his virtues. 545
 If here it pleaseth him to stay, remember,

[to the Chorus.

'Tis my command you guard this stranger well.
 If thou wouldst rather go with me, thou mayst ;
 I leave it to thy choice.

[to Œdipus.

ŒDI. Reward them, Jove !

THE. What says't thou, wilt thou follow me ?

ŒDI. I would, 550

If it were lawful ; but it must be here ;
 This is the place—

THE. For what? I'll not deny thee—

ŒDI. Where I must conquer those who banish'd me.

THE. That would be glory and renown to this,
Thy place of refuge.

ŒDI. If I may depend 555
On thy fair promise.

THE. Fear not, I shall never
Betray my friend.

ŒDI. I will not bind thee to it
By oath, like those whom we suspect of ill.

THE. Thou need'st not, Œdipus! my word's my
oath.

ŒDI. How must I act then?

THE. Fear'st thou aught?

ŒDI. I do; 560

A force will come against me.

THE. Here's thy guard;
[Pointing to the Chorus.]

These shall protect thee.

ŒDI. If thou goest, remember
And save me, Theseus!

THE. Teach not me my duty.

ŒDI. Still am I fearful.

THE. Theseus is not so. 564

ŒDI. Know'st thou not what they threaten'd?

THE. This I know,

No power on earth shall wrest thee from this place.

Ofttimes the angry soul will vent its wrath

In idle threats, with high and empty words;

Which ever, as the mind is to itself

Restored, are—nothing; they may boast their
strength, 570

And say they'll tear thee from me; but I tell thee,

The journey would be long and tedious to them.

They will not hazard it; they dare not: therefore

Be comforted; for if, by Phœbus sent,

Thou hither camest, thou art safe without my
aid, 575

Ev'n if I leave thee safe ; for know, the name
Of Theseus here sufficeth to protect thee.

[*Exit Theseus.*]

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

Thou art come in happy time,	
Stranger ! to this blissful clime,	
Long for swiftest steeds renown'd,	580
Fertilest of the regions round,	
Where, beneath the ivy shade,	
In the dew-besprinkled glade,	
Many a love-lorn nightingale	
Warbles sweet her plaintive tale ;	585
Where the vine in clusters pours	
Her sweets, secured from wintry showers ;	
Nor scorching suns, nor raging storm	
The beauties of the year deform ;	

ANTISTROPHE I.

Where the sweet narcissus growing,	590
Where the yellow crocus blowing,	
Round the sacred altars twine,	
Off'ring to the powers divine ;	
Where the pure springs perpetual flow,	
Wat'ring the verdant meads below,	595
Which, with its earth-enriching waves	
The fair Cephissus ever laves ;	
Where, with his ever-sporting train,	
Bacchus wantons on the plain,	
Pleased with the muses still to rove,	600
And golden Venus, queen of love.	

STROPHE II.

Alone within this happy land,	
Planted here by Nature's hand,	
Which nor Asia's fertile plains,	
Nor Pelops' spacious isle contains,	605
Pallas ! thy sacred olive grows,	
Striking terror on our foes ;	

Ever free from hostile rage,
From wanton youth, or greedy age ;
Happy in sage Minerva's love, 610
And guarded still by Morian Jove.

ANTISTROPHE II.

But nobler gifts and fairer fame,
Athens ! yet adorn thy name ;
Such wondrous gifts hath poured on thee
Thy great protecting deity. 615
Here first, obedient to command,
Form'd by Neptune's skilful hand,
The steed was taught to know the rein,
And bear the chariot o'er the plain ;
Here first along the rapid tide 620
The stately vessels learn'd to ride,
And swifter down the current flow
Than Nereids cut the waves below. [*Exeunt.*]

ACT II.

ANTIGONE, ŒDIPUS, CHORUS.

ANT. GREAT are thy praises, Attica ! and now 624
The time is come to show thou dost deserve them.

ŒDI. What means my daughter ? Speak : what
new event
Alarms thee ?

ANT. Creon, with a numerous band
Of followers, comes this way.

ŒDI. O, now, my friends !
If ever, help me.

CHO. Fear not ; we'll protect thee.
Though I am old, the strength of Attica 630
Is not decay'd.

Enter CREON, with ATTENDANTS.

CRE. Most honour'd citizens !
I see you look with eyes of fear upon me,
Without a cause ; for know, I came not here,
SOPH.—D d

Intending aught of violence or ill
 Against a city so renown'd in Greece 635
 As yours hath ever been ; I only came,
 Commission'd by the state of Thebes, to fetch
 This old man back, if by persuasion mild
 I could induce him to return ; not sent
 By one alone, but the united voice 40
 Of a whole people, who assign'd the task
 To me, because, by blood united to him,
 I felt for his misfortunes as my own.
 Come, therefore, Œdipus ! attend me home ;
 Thebes calls thee back ; thy kingdom now demands
 thee ; 645

By me she calls thee : listen to thy friend ;
 For surely Creon were the worst of men,
 If he could look on woes like thine unmoved ;
 When I behold thee in a foreign land,
 A wretched wand'rer, forced to beg thy bread, 650
 From place to place, with this unhappy maid,
 Whom little did I think to see exposed
 To misery and shame, of nuptial rites
 Hopeless, and thus bereft of every aid.
 O ! 'tis reproach and infamy to us 655
 And to our race ; but 'tis already known,
 And cannot be concealed. O Œdipus !
 I here beseech thee, by our country's gods,
 Return to Thebes ; bid thou a kind farewell
 (For she deserves it) to this noble city, 660
 But still remember thy own dearer country.

ŒDI. Thou daring hypocrite ! whose specious
 wiles

Beneath fair semblance mean but to betray,
 Why wouldst thou tempt me thus ? why thus once
 more

Ensnare me in thy toils, and make me still 665
 More wretched than I am ! Long time oppress'd
 By heaviest woes, I pined within my palace,
 And longed for exile ; but thou then refusedst
 To let me go, till satiated with grief,

My soul at length was calm, and much I wish'd 670
 To spend my few remaining years at home.
 Then thou (for little did the kindred blood
 Thou talk'st of then avail) didst banish me ;
 And now again thou com'st to make me wretched ;
 Because thou seest this kind benignant city 675
 Embrace and cherish, thou wouldst drag me hence,
 With sweetest words cov'ring thy bitter mind,
 Professing love to those who choose it not.
 He who denies his charitable aid
 To the poor beggar in his utmost need, 680
 And, if abundance comes, should offer that
 Which is not wanted, little merits thanks.
 Such is thy bounty now, in word alone,
 And not in deed, the friend of Œdipus.
 But I will tell them what thou art : thou camest not
 To take me hence, but leave me in the borders 686
 Of Thebes, that so thy kingdom may escape
 The impending ills which this avenging city
 Shall pour upon it : but 'twill come to pass
 As I foretold ; my evil genius still 690
 Shall haunt thee, and my sons no more of Thebes
 Inherit than shall serve them for a grave.
 Thy country's fate is better known to me
 Than to thyself, for my instruction comes
 From surer guides, from Phœbus and from Jove. 695
 Thy artful speech shall little serve thy purpose ;
 'Twill only hurt thy cause : therefore, begone ;
 I am not to be persuaded. Let me live
 In quiet here ; for, wretched as I am,
 'Twill be some comfort to be far from thee. 700

CRE. Think'st thou I heed thy words ? Who'll
 suffer most

For this perverseness, thou or I ?

ŒDI. I trust
 Thy little arts will naught avail with me
 Or with my friends.

CRE. Poor wretch ! no time can cure
 Thy follies ; thy old age is grown delirious. 705

ÆDI. Thou hast a hateful tongue; but few, how
just

Soe'er they be, can always speak aright.

CRE. But to say much, and to say well, are things
Which differ widely.

ÆDI. What thou say'st, no doubt,
Is brief and proper too.

CRE. 'Twill hardly seem so 710
To those who think like thee.

ÆDI. Away, nor dare
Direct my steps, as if thou hadst the power
To place me where thou wilt.

CRE. Remember all
To witness this, for he shall answer it
When he is mine.

ÆDI. But who shall force me hence 715
Against the will of these my friends?

CRE. Their aid
Is vain; already I have done what much
Will hurt thee.

ÆDI. Ha! what threats are these?

CRE. Thy daughters
Must go with me: one is secured, and now,
This moment will I wrest the other from thee. 720

ÆDI. O me!

CRE. I'll give thee much more cause for grief.

ÆDI. Hast thou my daughter?

CRE. Ay, and will have this.

ÆDI. [*to the Chorus.*] What will you do, my friends?

Will you forsake me?

Will you not drive this vile, abandon'd man
Forth from your city?

CHO. Stranger? hence; away; 725
Thy actions are most shameful and unjust.

CRE. Slaves! do your office; bear her off by force
If she consents not.

ANT. Whither shall I fly
For aid? What god or man shall I implore
To succour me?

CHO. Alas! what wouldst thou do? 730
 CRE. I touch not him, but I must have my own.
 ANT. O princes! aid me now.
 CHO. 'Tis most unjust.
 CRE. I say 'tis just.
 CHO. Then prove it.
 CRE. They are mine.
 CHO. O citizens!
 ANT. O, loose me! if you do not,
 You shall repent this violence.
 CRE. Go on; 735
 I will defend you.
 ŒDI. He who injures me
 Offends the city.
 CHO. Said I not before
 It would be thus?
 CRE. [*to the Chorus.*] Let go the maid this instant.
 CHO. Command where thou hast power.
 CRE. Let her go.
 CHO. 'Begone thyself: what, ho! my country-
 men! 741
 The city is in danger; haste, and save us.
 [*Creon's followers seize on Antigone.*]
 ANT. I'm seized, my friends! O, help!
 ŒDI. Where is my daughter?
 ANT. Torn from thee.
 ŒDI. O! stretch forth thy hand.
 ANT. I cannot.
 CRE. Away with her.
 ŒDI. O wretched Œdipus!
 CRE. No longer shall these tender props support
 Thy feeble age. Since thou art still resolved, 746
 Against thyself, thy country, and thy friends,
 By whose command I come, remain perverse
 And obstinate, old man! but know, hereafter,
 Time will convince thee thou hast ever been 750
 Thy own worst foe; thy fiery temper still
 Must make thee wretched.

CHO. Stranger! stir not hence.

- CRE. I charge you, touch me not.
 CHO. Thou shalt not go
 Till thou restor'st the virgins.
 CRE. I must have
 A nobler ransom from your city; these 755
 Shall not suffice.
 CHO. What mean'st thou?
 CRE. He shall go,
 This Œdipus.
 CHO. Thy threats are terrible.
 CRE. I'll do it; and only he who governs here
 Shall hinder me.
 ŒDI. O insolence! Thou wilt not,
 Thou dar'st not, force me.
 CRE. Hold thy peace.
 ŒDI. Not even 760
 The dreadful goddesses, who here preside,
 Should bind my tongue from heaviest curses on
 thee;
 For thou hast robb'd me of the only light
 These eyes could boast. But may the all-seeing
 sun
 Behold and punish thee and all thy race, 765
 And load thy age with miseries like mine!
 CRE. Inhabitants of Athens! hear ye this?
 ŒDI. They do, and see that but with fruitless
 words
 I can repay the injuries I received;
 For I am weak with age, and here alone. 770
 CRE. No longer will I curb my just resentment,
 But force thee hence.
 ŒDI. O me!
 CHO. What boldness, stranger!
 Could make thee hope to do a deed like this
 Unpunish'd?
 CRE. 'Tis resolved.
 CHO. Our Athens then
 Is fallen indeed, and is no more a city. 775
 CRE. In a just cause the weak may foil the mighty.

ŒDI. Hear how he threatens—

CHO. What he'll ne'er perform.

CRE. That Jove alone can tell.

CHO. Shall injuries

Like these be suffer'd?

CRE. Call it injury 779

Thou mayst; 'tis such as thou perforce must bear.

CHO. This is too much: ye rulers of the land!

My fellow-citizens! come forth, and save us.

Enter THESEUS.

THE. Whence is this clamour? Wherefore am I
call'd

From sacred rites, at Neptune's altar paid,
Our guardian god? Say, what's the cause, that thus
In haste I'm summon'd hither?

ŒDI. O my friend! 786
(For well I know thy voice) most cruelly
Have I been treated by this man.

THE. Who did it?

ŒDI. This Creon, whom thou seest, hath ravish'd
from me

My only help, my daughters.

THE. Ha! what sayest thou? 790

ŒDI. 'Tis as I tell thee.

THE. [*to his attendants.*] Quick, despatch my ser-
vants;

Fly to the altar, summon all my people,
Horsemen and foot; give o'er the sacrifice,
And instant to the double gate repair,
Lest with the virgins the base ravishers 795
Escape unpunish'd, and my guest, thus injured,
Laugh me to scorn for cowardice. Away!

Were I to punish this oppressor here

[turning to Creon.]

As my resentment bids, and he deserves,
He should this instant fall beneath my rage: 800
But the same justice he to others deals,
Himself shall meet from us. Thou shalt not go,

Till those, whom thou didst basely ravish hence,
Are brought before me: 'twas unlike thyself,
Unworthy of thy country and thy race, 805
To enter thus a cultivated city,
Where law and justice reign, with violence
And rapine snatching what thy fancy pleased.
Or didst thou think I ruled a desert land,
Or that my people were a race of slaves, 810
And Theseus but the shadow of a king?
Thebes never taught thee such destructive lessons,
For she abhors injustice: when she hears
That Creon, thus despising sacred laws,
Hath taken with brutal violence my right, 815
And would have stolen a wretched suppliant from
me,

She'll not approve thy conduct. Say, I went
To Thebes, how just soever were the cause,
I should not seize on aught without the leave
Of him who govern'd there; but, as becomes 820
A stranger, bear myself unblamed by all.
Thou hast disgraced thy country and thy friends,
And weight of years hath taken thy senses from
thee.

Again I say, restore the virgins to me,
Or stay with me thyself, for so thou shalt, 825
Howe'er unwilling. What I've said, remember,
Is what I have resolved; therefore determine.

CHO. [*to Creon.*] Stranger! thy actions, noble as
thou art,

But ill become thy family and name,
Because unjust; but thou behold'st thy fate. 830

CRE. Theseus! it was not that I thought this city
Without or guards to save, or laws to rule,
Which brought me here, nor unadvised I came;
But that I hoped you never would receive
My kindred here against my will, nor e'er 835
Embrace a vile, incestuous parricide,
Or cherish and protect him, in a land
Whose court, renown'd for justice, suffers not

Such poor abandon'd exiles to reside
 Within its borders ; therefore did I this, 840
 Which yet I had not done, but for the curses
 Which he hath pour'd on me and all my race.
 Revenge inspired me : anger, well thou know'st,
 Can never be extinguish'd but by death,
 Which closeth ev'ry wound. At present, Theseus !
 It must be as thou wilt ; my want of power, 846
 How just soe'er my cause, demands submission :
 Yet old and weak, I shall not tamely yield.

ŒDI. Audacious man ! think'st thou the vile re-
 proach

Thou utter'st falls on me or on thyself ? 850
 Thou, who upbraid'st me thus for all my woes,
 Murder and incest, which against my will
 I had committed (so it pleased the gods,
 Offended at my race for former crimes ;
 But I am guiltless) ; canst thou name a fault 855
 Deserving this ? For tell me, was it mine,
 When to my father Phœbus did declare
 That he should one day perish by the hand
 Of his own child ? Was Œdipus to blame,
 Who had no being then ? If, born at length 860
 To wretchedness, he met his sire unknown,
 And slew him, that involuntary deed
 Canst thou condemn ? And for my fatal marriage,
 Dost thou not blush to name it ? Was not she
 Thy sister, she who bore me (ignorant 865
 And guiltless woman !), afterward my wife,
 And mother to my children ? What she did,
 She did unknowing, not like thee, who thus
 Dost purposely upbraid us both. Heaven knows,
 Unwillingly I wedded her, and now 870
 Unwillingly repeat the dreadful tale :
 But not for that, nor for my murder'd father,
 Have I deserved thy bitter taunts ; for, tell me,
 Thy life attack'd, wouldst thou have stay'd to ask
 The assassin if he were thy father ! No, 875
 Self-love would urge thee to revenge the insult.

Thus was I drove to ill by the angry gods;
 This, should my father's soul revisit earth,
 Himself would own, and pity Œdipus.
 Thy bold and impious tongue still utters all ; 880
 Just or unjust, thou pour'st thy foul reproach
 On me, pretending to revere the name
 Of Theseus and his country ; but, remember,
 The city, which thou thus hast praised, is famed
 For piety and reverence to the gods ; 885
 Yet wouldst thou drive a needy suppliant thence,
 And lead him captive. Thou hast stolen my
 daughter ;

But I implore the dreadful goddesses
 To grant me aid, that thou mayst feel the power
 Which thou condemn'st, and know the force of
 Athens. 890

CHO. [*to Theseus.*] O king ! this stranger merits
 thy regard ;

His woes are great ; his cause should be defended.

THE. No more ; the ravishers are fled with speed,
 While we, who suffer, stand inactive here.

CRE. Speak thy commands, for I must yield to
 thee. 895

THE. Go thou before me ; I shall follow close
 If here thou hast conceal'd the virgins, now
 Discover them ; if hence, to others' hands
 Committed, they are fled, they shall not 'scape :
 My servants soon will fetch them back. Meantime
 Remember thy condition, for thy fate 901
 Hath caught thee in the net which thou hadst spread
 For others. But what evil means acquire
 Is seldom kept : thou cam'st not naked here,
 Or unattended, thus to do an act 905
 Of violence. Ere long, I'll know on what
 Thou didst rely, nor by a single arm
 Shall Athens fall ingloriously : hear'st thou this
 Or are my words unheeded ?

CRE. 'Tis not now
 A time to answer : we shall know at home 910
 What must be done.

[*Exeunt Theseus and Creon.*]

STROPHE I.

915

925

935

920 Torches were carried in the Eleusinian rites, probably in memory of those which Ceres and her attendants are supposed to have made use of in their search after Proserpine. These mysteries were performed by night in the most solemn manner by the Eumolpidæ, or priests of Ceres; and none were admitted to them but the pure and unspotted, who were bound to inviolable secrecy.

My soul prophetic sees the maid
 For pious duty thus repaid ;
 For ever active is the power of Jove,
 From whom perpetual blessings flow.
 O ! that I now could, like the dove, 940
 Soar through the skies, and mark the field below,
 The wish'd-for conquest joyful to behold,
 And triumph in the victory I foretold !

ANTISTROPHE II.

Thou power supreme, all powers above,
 All-seeing, all-performing Jove ! 945
 Grant that the rulers of this land
 May soon subdue the hostile band !
 Then too, O Pallas ! hunter Phœbus ! thee
 Do we invoke ; with thee be join'd
 Thy virgin sister Deity, 950
 Who loves o'er lawns to chase the spotted hind :
 On you we call ; your aid propitious bring :
 O ! haste, protect our country and our king. [*Exeunt.*]

ACT III.

ŒDIPUS, THESEUS, ANTIGONE, ISMENE, CHORUS.

CHO. I'm no false prophet, stranger ! for, behold
 Thy daughters.

ŒDI. Ha ! what say'st thou ? Where ? O ! where !

ANT. My father ! O my father ! what kind god 956
 Raised up this friend, who hath restored us to thee !

ŒDI. Are then my daughters with me ?

ANT. Theseus' arm
 Hath brought us here ; to him and to his friends
 We owe our safety.

ŒDI. O ! come nigh, my children ! 960
 Let me embrace you ; never did I think
 Again to fold you in these arms.

ANT. We come
 With joy, my father !

ŒDI. O ! where are you ?

ANT.

Here.

ŒDI. My dearest children!

ANT.

To our father still

May every pleasure come!

ŒDI. [*leaning on Antigone.*] My best support! 965

ANT. The wretched bear the wretched.

ŒDI. [*embracing them.*]

I have all

That's precious to me: were I now to die,

While you are here, I should not be unhappy.

Support me, daughters! to your father's side 969

Close press'd; O! sooth to peace a wretched exile,

Long time deserted: tell me what hath happen'd;

But let the tale be short, as best becomes

Thy tender age.

ANT. [*pointing to Theseus.*] Here is our great protector.

He will inform you; so shall what I speak

Be brief as thou wouldst have it.

ŒDI.

Noble Theseus! 975

My children thus beyond my hopes restored,

If I should talk too long on such a theme,

Thou wilt not wonder. 'Tis to thee alone

I owe my joys; thou didst protect and save

My much-loved daughters. May the gods repay 980

Thee and thy kingdom for this goodness to me!

Here only have I found or faith, or truth,

Or justice; you alone possess them all:

I will attest it, for I know it well.

I feel your virtues; what I have is all

985

From you. O king! permit me but to touch

Thy hand; O! stretch it forth, or let me kiss

Thy honour'd lips! But, O! what do I say!

Can such a wretch as Œdipus e'er hope,

With guilty hands, to touch a man like thee, 990

So pure, so spotless! Yet I must embrace thee:

They only who have known misfortunes feel

For others' griefs with sympathising wo.

Hail, best of men; and mayst thou ever be,

As thou hast been, my guardian and my friend! 995

SOPH.—E e

THE. Thus happy as thou must be in thy children,
Hadst thou said more, much more, and talk'd to
them

Rather than me, it had not moved my wonder.
Nor think I should resent it ; not by words
Would Theseus be distinguish'd, but by deeds 1000
Illustrious : this thou know'st ; for what I swore
I have perform'd, restored thy daughters to thee,
Safe from the tyrant's threats ; how passed the con-
flict

Why should I boast ? They at their leisure best
May tell you all : meantime to what I heard, 1005
As hither coming, Œdipus attend ;
Of little import seem'd the circumstance,
And yet 'twas strange : but naught should mortal
man

Deem of beneath his notice or his care.

ŒDI. What is it, son of Ægeus ? O ! inform me,
For nothing have I heard.

THE. A man, they say, 1011
Who boasts himself by blood allied to thee,
At Neptune's altar, while I sacrificed,
In humblest posture stood.

ŒDI. What could it mean ?
Whence came he ?

THE. That I know not : this alone 1015
They told me ; suppliant he requested much
To talk awhile with thee.

ŒDI. With me ? 'Tis strange,
And yet, methinks, important.

THE. He desired
But to converse with thee, and then depart.

ŒDI. Who can it be ?

THE. Hast thou no friend at Argos ? 1020
None of thy kindred there who wish'd to see
thee ?

ŒDI. No more, my friend !

THE. What say'st thou ?

ŒDI. Do not ask me.

THE. Ask what—

ŒDI. I know him now ; I know too well
Who's at the altar.

THE. Who is it ?

ŒDI. My son ;
That hateful son, whose voice I loath to hear. 1025

THE. But why not hear him ? Still thou mayst
refuse

What he shall ask.

ŒDI. I cannot, cannot bear it ;
Do not oblige me.

THE. But the sacred place
Where now he stands, and reverence to the gods,
Demand it of thee.

ANT. Let me, O my father ! 1030
Young as I am, admonish thee. O ! grant
Thy friend his just request ; obey the gods,
And let our brother come ; whate'er he says,
It need not draw thee from thy first resolve.

What harm to hear him ? Words have oft pro-
duced 1035

The noblest works ; remember, 'tis thy child :
Thou didst beget him ; though he were the worst
Of sons to thee, yet would it ill become
A father to return it. Let him come. 1039
Others, like thee, have base, unworthy children,
And yet their minds are soften'd to forgiveness
By friends' advice, and all their wrath subdued.
Think on thy own unhappy parent's fate ;
Thence mayst thou learn what dreadful ills have
flow'd

From anger's bitter fountain. Thou, alas ! 1045
Art a sad proof ; those sightless eyes too well
Bear witness to it : those who only ask
What justice warrants should not ask in vain ;
Nor who receives a benefit forget
The hand that gave, but study to repay it. 1050

ŒDI. You have o'ercome me : with reluctant
pleasure

I yield: my children! be it as you please;
But if he comes, O Theseus! guard my life.

THE. I've said enough; no more; I will not
boast;

But thou art safe, if Heaven forsakes not me. 1055

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

In sacred wisdom's path is seldom seen
The wretch whom sordid love of wealth inspires;
Neglectful of the happy golden mean,
His soul nor truth nor heavenly knowledge fires.
No length of days to him can pleasure bring; 1060
In death alone he finds repose,
End of his wishes and his woes,
In that uncomfortable night,
Where never music's charms delight,
Nor virgin choirs their hymeneals sing. 1065

ANTISTROPHE.

The happiest fate of man is not to be;
And next in bliss is he who, soon as born,
From the vain world and all its sorrows free,
Shall whence he came with speediest foot return:
For youth is full of folly, toils, and wo, 1070
Of war, sedition, pain, and strife,
With all the busy ills of life;
Till helpless age comes creeping on,
Deserted, friendless, and alone,
Which neither power, nor joy, nor pleasure knows.

EPODE.

The hapless Œdipus, like me, 1076
Is doom'd to age and misery;
Ev'n as around the northern shore
The bleak winds howl, and tempests roar,
Contending storms in terror meet, 1080
And dashing waves for ever beat;
Thus is the wretched king with grief oppress'd,
And woes on woes afflict his long-distemper'd breast.
[Exit.]

ACT IV.

ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, ISMENE, CHORUS.

ANT. This way, my father! Lo! the wretched
man

Approaches, unattended and in tears. 1085

ŒDI. Who comes, my child?

ANT. Ev'n he I told thee of,
Poor Polynices.

Enter POLYNICES.

POL. O my sisters! see
Of all mankind the most unhappy. Where
Shall I begin! Shall I lament my own,
Or shall I weep an aged parent's fate? 1090

For O! 'tis horrible to find him thus
A wandering exile in a foreign land;
In this mean garb with wild dishevell'd hair,
Bereft of sight, and destitute, perhaps,
Of needful food and nourishment. Alas! 1095

Too late I know it, worthless as I am;
I flew to succour him, to plead my cause,
That not from others he might hear the tale
Of my misfortunes: sacred Pity sits
Fast by the throne of Jove, o'er all his works 1100

Presiding gracious: O! let her inspire
Thy breast, my father! Crimes already done,
Which cannot be recall'd, may still be heal'd
By kind forgiveness: why then art thou silent?
O! speak, my father! do not turn aside; 1105

Wilt thou not answer? Wilt thou let me go
Without one word, nor tell me whence thy wrath
Contemptuous springs? My sisters! you at least
Will try to move his unrelenting heart,
And loose his closed lips; that, not thus spurn'd
And thus unanswered, though a suppliant here 1111

At Neptune's altar, I return with shame
And foul disgrace.

ANT. Say, wherefore didst thou come !
My hapless brother ! tell thy mournful tale :
Such is the power of words, that whether sweet
They move soft pity, or when bitter urge 1116
To violence and wrath, at least they ope
The unwilling lips, and make the silent speak.

POL. 'Tis well advised, and I will tell thee all,
O ! may that deity propitious smile, 1120
Whose altar late I left, whence Theseus raised
This wretched suppliant, and in converse free
Mix'd gracious with me ! May I hope from you
The like benevolence ! And now, my father !
I'll tell thee wherefore Polynices came : 1125
Thou seest me banish'd from my native land,
Unjustly banish'd, for no other crime,
But that I strove to keep the throne of Thebes,
By birthright mine, from him who drove me thence,
The young Eteocles : not his the claim 1130
By justice, nor to me his fame in arms
Superior ; but by soft, persuasive arts
He won the rebel city to his love.
Thy curse, my father, was the cause of all,
I know it was ; for so the priests declared 1135
In oracles divine : to Argos then
I came, and to Adrastus' daughter join'd
In marriage, gain'd the Argive chiefs, renown'd
For martial deeds. Seven valiant leaders march
To Thebes, resolved to conquer or to die. 1140
Therefore to thee, my father ! came I here,
To beg thy aid for me and these my friends,
Companions of the war, who threaten Thebes
With their united powers, in order thus :
The wise and brave Amphiaraus, or skill'd 1145
To cast the spear, or with prophetic tongue
Disclose the will of Heaven, with Ceneus' son,
Ætolian Tydeus, and Eteocles,
At Argos born ; to these, Hippomedon

Sent by Talaus, his renowned sire, 1150
 Bold Capaneus, who threatens soon to raze
 The walls of mighty Thebes: to close the train,
 Parthenopæan Arcas comes, the son
 Of Atalantis, from her virgin name
 So call'd: with these, thy hapless son (the child
 Of dire misfortune rather) leads his force 1156
 From Argos to rebellious Thebes: for these,
 And for their children, for the lives of all,
 Suppliant to thee we come, in humble prayer,
 To deprecate thy wrath against a wretch, 1160
 Who, injured much, but seeks the vengeance due
 To a base brother, whose oppressive hand
 Hath drove me from my country and my throne.
 If there be truth in what the gods declare,
 On him shall victory smile, for whom thy vows 1165
 Shall rise propitious; therefore, by our gods
 And native fountains, O! remit thy anger,
 And smile upon me, on a banish'd man,
 A beggar like thyself, who lives, like thee,
 By others' bounty; in one common fate 1170
 We are united, while the tyrant sits
 In ease at home, and laughs our woes to scorn.
 Yet if thou wouldst but listen to my vows,
 Soon might I cast him forth, restore thee soon
 To thy dear native land, and seat myself 1175
 In my own kingdom. Thy assent, my father!
 Is all I ask; but, O! without thy aid
 I have no hope of safety or revenge.

CHO. For Theseus' sake, O! give him answer now,
 And let him go.

ŒDI. But that the noble Theseus, 1180
 Who hither brought him, did request it of me,
 He ne'er had heard the voice of Œdipus;
 And little pleasure will it now bestow.
 Ungrateful wretch! who, when the throne of Thebes,

[turning to Polynices.]

Where now thy brother sits, wast thine, didst drive
 Thy father hence to penury and wo; 1186

Now, when thou seest me in this mean attire,
 Thou weep'st my fate, because 'tis like thy own.
 But I'll not weep, for I can bear it all.
 Still, wicked parricide! remembering thee, 1190
 The cruel cause of all: thou mad'st me thus
 On others' bounty to rely for food
 And nourishment: for thee, I might have perish'd;
 But these my pious daughters, these alone,
 Beyond their sex's power, with manly aid 1195
 Have cherish'd and protected me: for you,
 Who call yourselves my sons, ye are not mine;
 I know you not. Though Heaven hath spared you
 long,
 Death will o'ertake you; when thy forces come
 To Thebes, which shall not fall before thy arms,
 There soon shalt thou and thy vile brother die. 1201
 Long since my curses did declare thy fate,
 Which here I do repeat, that you may learn
 The reverence due to parents, and no more
 Reproach a sightless father. Look on these 1205
 My duteous daughters: did they act like you?
 They never did; and therefore to the throne,
 Which you have forfeited, shall they succeed,
 If Justice still, as she is ever wont,
 Sits at the hand of Jove: meantime, thou worst,
 Thou most abandon'd of the race of men! 1211
 Begone! away! and with thee bear this curse,
 Which here I do pronounce: to Argos ne'er
 Mayst thou return! never may Thebes be thine!
 Soon mayst thou perish by a brother's hand, 1215
 Slaying the slayer! May dark Erebus
 Receive them both! And now on you I call,
 Ye goddesses revered! and thou, O Mars!
 Thou, who hast raised the bitter strife between
 My impious sons, bear witness to my words! 1220
 Farewell: now go, and tell the Thebans, tell
 Thy faithful friends, how fair an heritage
 Your Œdipus hath here bequeathed his children.
 CHO. O Polynices! little is the joy

Which we can give thee of this fatal journey ; 1225
Therefore away, and leave us.

POL. A sad path
These steps have trod indeed, of wo to me
And to my friends. Was it for this, alas !
I came from Argos ? I can never tell
My mournful story there, never return, 1230
O ! I must bury it in silence all.

My sisters ! ye have heard the dreadful curse
Which he pronounced. O ! if it be fulfill'd,
And some kind hand restore you back to Thebes,
At least remember me ; at least perform 1235
The funeral rites, and hide me in the tomb :
So shall your names, for pious tenderness
To an unhappy father long revered,
With added praises crown'd, exalted shine,
For this kind office to a brother's shade. 1240

ANT. O Polynices ! let me beg thee, hear
Thy sister now.

POL. My dear Antigone !
What say'st thou ?

ANT. Lead thy armies back to Argos,
Nor thus destroy thy country and thyself.

POL. It cannot be ; my forces, once dismiss'd 1245
Through fear, what power shall e'er reunite them ?

ANT. But wherefore all this rage ? What canst
thou hope
Of fame or profit by the fall of Thebes ?

POL. 'Tis base to fly, and, eldest born as I am,
To be the laughter of a younger brother. 1250

ANT. Dost thou not dread the oracles pronounced
Against you both, death by each other's hand ?

POL. I know the sentence, but we must go on.

ANT. Alas ! and who shall dare to follow thee,
After this dire prediction ?

POL. None shall know it, 1255
The prudent general tells the good alone,
And keeps the threaten'd ill unknown to all.

ANT. Art thou determin'd then, and wilt thou go ?

POL. Do not dissuade me, for the task is mine ;
 And though a father's fatal curse attend me, 1260
 Though vengeful Furies shall await my steps,
 Yet I must go. May Jove indulgent smile
 On you, my sisters ! if, when I am dead
 (As soon I shall be), to my breathless corpse
 You pay due honours ! Now farewell for ever,
 For living ye shall ne'er again behold me. 1266

ANT. Alas, my brother !

POL. Do not weep for me.

ANT. Who would not weep to see thee rushing thus
 On certain death ?

POL. If I must die, I must

ANT. Yet be persuaded.

POL. Ask me not to do 1270
 A deed unworthy of me.

ANT. Losing thee,
 I shall be most unhappy.

POL. To the gods
 Alone belong the fate of mortals ; some
 Are born to happiness, and some to wo.
 You may they guard from every ill, for sure 1275
 Ye merit all the good they can bestow.

[Exit POLYNICES.]

CHO. Fresh sorrows hath this hapless stranger
 brought
 On me and all ; but so hath Heaven decreed,
 Which nothing doth in vain ; while time beholds
 And orders all, inflicting wo on wo : 1280
 But hark ! the thunder roars : almighty Jove !

ÆD. My daughters ! O my daughters ! who will
 bring
 The noble Theseus here, that best of men ?

ANT. Wherefore, my father ! should we call him
 hither ? 1284

ÆD. This winged lightning from the arm of Jove
 Must bear me to the shades below. Where's The-
 seus ?

Let him be sent for instantly.

CHO. Again!
 Another dreadful clap! It strikes my soul
 With horror, and my hairs do stand on end
 With fear. Behold, again the lightnings flash! 1290
 I dread the consequence, for not in vain
 These signs appear, of some calamity
 Portentous ever. O, ethereal Jove!

ŒDI. Alas, my children! naught can save me now;
 The fatal hour of my departure hence 1295
 Draws nigh.

ANT. Why think'st thou so?

ŒDI. I know it well:
 Send for the king immediately.

CHO. Alas!
 The thunder rolls on every side. Good Heaven
 Protect us! If to this devoted land
 It bodes destruction, let not ruin fall 1300
 On me! O let not that be our reward
 For pitying thus a poor deserted stranger!
 O Jove! on thee we call; protect and save us!

ŒDI. Is Theseus come? Shall he once more
 behold me,
 While yet I live, and keep my perfect mind? 1305

CHO. What secret hast thou to reveal to him?

ŒDI. I owe him much, and would repay his good-
 ness,
 Ev'n as I promised him.

CHO. O, haste, my son!
 At Neptune's altar leave the sacrifice,
 And hither fly; for Œdipus, to thee 1310
 And to thy country grateful, waits to pay
 Thy bounties: haste, O Theseus, to receive them.

Enter THESEUS.

THE. Again this noise, this wild astonishment,
 Among you all? Was Œdipus the cause,
 Or did the bolt of Jove, and rushing hail, 1315
 Affright you? When the god in raging storms
 Descends thus dreadful, we have cause to fear.

ŒDI. O king ! thou com'st in happy hour ; so
god

Propitious led thee hither.

THE. Son of Laius !

What new event hath happen'd ?

ŒDI. Know, my life !
At length is verging to its latest hour.

I wish to die ; but first my vows to thee

And to this city faithful must perform.

THE. But who hath told thee thou so soon shalt
die ?

ŒDI. The gods themselves, who never utter falsehood,
1

By signs infallible have warn'd me of it.

THE. How spake they to thee ?

ŒDI. In repeated thunder
And lightning, from the all-powerful hand of Jove

THE. I do believe thee, for thy prophecies
Were never false : but say, what must be done ?

ŒDI. O son of Ægeus ! I will tell thee all
1
The bliss reserved for thee in thy age ;

For thee, and for thy country : I must go
To my appointed place, and there shall die.

I go without a guide, nor must thou tell
1

To mortal ear where Œdipus doth lie,
For ever hid. O king ! that sacred place

Shall be thy sure defence, and better far
Than many a shield, or all the social aid

Of firm alliance in the field of war :
1

What more remains, unutterable now,
Of higher import, thither when thou com'st,

To thee alone shall be deliver'd ; naught

Shall I reveal, or to the citizens,
1

Or ev'n to these, beloved as they are,
1

My pious daughters. Thou must ever keep

The solemn secret ; only, when thy life

Draws near its end, disclose it to thy son,

Heir of thy kingdom, and to him alone :

From king to king thus shall the tale devolve, 1

And thus thy Athens be for ever safe.
From Theban force : even the best of cities,
Where justice rules, may swerve from virtue's
laws,

And be oppressive ; but the gods, though late,
Will one day punish all who disobey 1355
Their sacred mandates : therefore, son of Ægeus !
Be careful ; and be just ; but this to thee
I need not say. Quick, let us to the place,
For so the gods decree : there must I go, 1359
Thence never to return. Come then, my daughters !
Long have ye been my pious guides ; henceforth
I must be yours ; follow, but touch me not.
Let me find out the tomb where I must hide
My poor remains ; that way my journey lies.

[pointing with his hand.]

Away ! Thou god of shades, great Mercury, 1365
And Proserpine, infernal powers, conduct me !
O sightless eyes, where are ye ? Never more
Shall these hands touch your unavailing orbs.
O light and life ! farewell : at length I go
To hide me in the tomb ; but, O ! for thee, 1370
My best beloved friend ! and this fair land,
And these thy subjects ;—may prosperity
Attend you still ; and may you sometimes deign,
Amid your bliss, to think on Œdipus ! *[Exeunt.]*

CHORUS.

Goddess invisible ! on thee we call, 1375
If thee we may invoke, Proserpina ! and thee,
Great Pluto, king of shades ! O grant,
That not, oppress'd by torturing pain,
Beneath the stroke of death he linger long ;
But swift, with easy steps, descend 1380
To Styx's drear abode ;
For he hath led a life of toil and pain.
May the just gods repay his undeserved wo !
Ye goddesses revered ! who dwell
Beneath the earth deep hid ; and thou 1385
SOPH.—Ff

Who, barking from the gloomy cave,
 Unconquer'd Cerberus! guard'st the ghosts below;
 On thee, O son of Tartarus! we call,
 For thou art ever wakeful: lead, O! lead 1389
 To thy dark mansions this unhappy stranger.
[*Exeunt.*]

ACT V.

MESSENGER, CHORUS.

MES. O citizens! I come to tell a tale—
 But to be brief, know, Œdipus is dead.
 To speak the manner and strange circumstance
 Of his departure, will require more words,
 And calls for your attention.

CHO. Is he gone? 1395
 Unhappy man!

MES. For ever hath he left
 The path of life.

CHO. How died he? By the hand
 Of Heaven dismiss'd, without disease or pain?

MES. O! 'twas a scene of wonder: how he left
 This plain, and self-conducted, led us on, 1400
 Blind as he was, ye all remembered well.
 Soon as he came to where the craggy steep,
 With brazen steps, leads to the hollow gulf,
 Where various paths unites, a place renown'd
 For the famed league of Theseus and his friend, 1405
 Between Acherdus and the Thracian rock,
 On a sepulchral stone he sat him down;
 Pull'd off the filthy weeds he long had worn,
 And bade his daughters instantly prepare
 The bath and splendid garb: with hasty steps 1410
 To Ceres' neighbouring altar they repair
 Obedient, bring the vessel, and the robe
 Funereal. All things done, as custom bids
 For dying men, sudden a dreadful clap
 Of thunder shook the ground: the virgins trembled,

And, clinging fearful round their father's knees, 1416
 Beat their sad breasts, and wept. Soon as he heard
 The sound portentous, he embraced his daughters;
 "Children," he cried, "your father is no more;
 No longer shall you lead a life of pain, 1420
 No longer toil for Œdipus. Alas!
 'Twas dreadful to you; but this day, my children!
 Shall end your sorrows and my life together.
 Never did father love his daughters more
 Than I have loved, but henceforth you must live
 Without your Œdipus: farewell for ever!" 1426
 He spake, and long, in sad embraces join'd,
 They wept aloud: at length did clamorous grief
 To silent sorrow yield, and all was still;
 When suddenly we heard a voice, that oft 1430
 Repeated, "Œdipus! why this delay?
 Where art thou, Œdipus?" The wretched king,
 Attentive to the call of Heaven, desired
 That Theseus might be sent for: Theseus came;
 When thus the dying exile:—"O my friend! 1435
 Give me thy hand; my daughters! give him yours;
 Let this, my dearest Theseus! be the pledge
 Of amity between you: promise here
 That you will ne'er forsake my hapless children,
 But henceforth cherish, comfort, and protect them."
 The generous king, in pity to their woes, 1441
 Vow'd to perform what Œdipus desired.
 The father threw his feeble arms around
 His weeping children:—"You," he cried, "must
 learn
 To bear your sufferings with an equal mind, 1445
 And leave this place; for not to mortal eye
 Is given to see my future fate: away,
 Theseus alone must stay, and know it all."
 This did we hear him utter, as we stood
 Attentive; when his duteous daughters left him, 1450
 And went their way: we wept, and follow'd them.
 Soon we return'd, but Œdipus was gone:
 The king alone remaining, as if struck

With terror at some dreadful spectacle,
Had with his hand o'erveil'd his downcast eye. 1455

A little after we beheld him bend
In humble adoration to the earth.

And then to Heaven prefer his ardent prayer.

How the poor exile perish'd, none can tell

But Theseus: nor the fiery blast of Jove 1460

Destroy'd, nor sea o'erwhelm'd him; but from
Heaven

Some messenger divine did snatch him hence;

Or power infernal bade the pitying earth

Open her peaceful bosom to receive him.

Without a groan, disease, or pain, he fell: 1465

'Twas wondrous all: to those who credit not

This strange report, I answer, 'tis most true.

CHO. Where are his daughters, with their weep-
ing friends

Who follow'd them?

MES. They cannot be far off:
The voice of grief I hear proclaims them nigh. 1470

Enter ANTIGONE, ISMENE, with Attendants.

ANT. Alas! the time is come, when we must
weep

Our father's fate, the fate of all his race,

Long since unhappy: various were the toils,

The labours we endured; but this is far,

Far above all, unutterable wo. 1475

CHO. What is it?

ANT. O! it cannot be conceived.

CHO. Is he then dead?

ANT. He is: his death was strange
And wonderful; for not in war he fell,
Nor did the sea o'erwhelm him, but the earth
Hath hid him from us; deadly night hath closed 1480
Our eyes in sadness. Whether o'er the seas
We roam, or exiles in a foreign land
Lead our sad days, we must be still unhappy.
Alas! I only wish I might have died

With my poor father : wherefore should I ask 1485
For longer life ?

CHO. Ye good and pious daughters !
Remember, what the will of Heaven decrees,
With patience we must bear ; indulge not, then,
Excess of grief ; your fate hath not deserved it.

ANT. O ! I was fond of misery with him : 1490
Ev'n what was most unlovely grew beloved,
When he was with me. O my dearest father !
Beneath the earth now in deep darkness hid,
Worn as thou wert with age, to me thou still
Wert dear, and shalt be ever.

CHO. Now his course 1495
Is finish'd.

ANT. Even as he wish'd, he died
In a strange land, for such was his desire ;
A shady turf cover'd his lifeless limbs :
Nor unlamented fell ; for, O ! these eyes,
My father ! still shall weep for thee, nor time 1500
E'er blot thee from my memory.

ISM. Alas,
Alas, my sister ! what must be our fate,
Forlorn and helpless, of our father thus
Bereft ?

CHO. His end was happy ; therefore cease
Your fruitless tears : from sorrow none is free. 1505

ANT. Let us be gone.

ISM. But where ?

ANT. I wish—

ISM. O ! what ?

ANT. To see the tomb.

ISM. Whose tomb ?

ANT. Our father's. O !

ISM. But is it lawful ? Know'st thou that ?

ANT. Why thus

Reprove me, my Ismene ?

ISM. He is yet

Unburied, and without—

ANT. O ! lead me there, 1510

Then kill me if thou wilt ; for where, alas !
Can I betake me ?

CHO. Friends ! be comforted.

ANT. Where shall I fly ?

CHO. Thou hast already 'scaped
Unnumber'd ills.

ANT. I'm thinking, my Ismene !—

ISM. What think'st thou ?

ANT. How we shall get home.

CHO. No more ;

Thou hast been long familiar with affliction. 1516

ANT. My life hath ever been a life of pain
And sorrow, but this far exceeds them all.

CHO. The storm beats hard upon you.

ANT. O ! it doth.

CHO. I know it must.

ANT. O ! whither shall we fly ? 1520

Great Jove ! what hope remains ?

CHO. Suppress your griefs ;

We should not weep for those who wish'd to die,
And meet their fate with pleasure ; 'tis not just
Nor lawful to lament them.

[Exeunt Messenger and Attendants.]

Enter THESEUS.

ANT. Son of Ægeus !

Suppliant to thee we come.

THE. What would ye of me ?

ANT. Permit us but to see our father's tomb. 1526

THE. It is not lawful.

ANT. O ! what say'st thou, king ?

THE. Know, pious virgins ! Œdipus himself

Forbade that any should approach his tomb :

That sacred spot which he possesses there 1530

No mortal must profane : to me, he said,

If careful I perform'd his last command,

Should joy and safety come, with victory

And peace to Athens : this your gods did hear

Confirm'd by the sacred oath of Jove. 1535

ANT. If such our father's will, we must submit :
But O ! permit us to revisit Thebes,
That so we may prevent the impending fate
Of our dear brothers.

THE. All that you request,
Or may be grateful to that honour'd shade, 1540
Whose memory we revere, I freely grant ;
For I must not be weary of my task.

CHO. Remember, virgins ! to repress your sorrows,
And cease your fruitless grief ; for know, 'tis all
Decreed by fate, and all the work of Heaven. 1545

END OF SOPHOCLES.

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